



LAUNCHING DIGITAL NAVIGATOR PROGRAMS IN TEXAS PUBLIC LIBRARIES

A PROGRAM OF THE TEXAS STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES COMMISSION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021-22, The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) awarded one-year grants to ten Texas libraries to support Digital Navigator programs. Digital Navigation addresses the digital divide by targeting the most impacted communities, mobilizing partnerships, undertaking needs assessments, and marketing services as well as offering instruction and help. This report highlights how a diverse group of Texas libraries executed that model in a one-year grant program and analyzes their successes and challenges.

Major conclusions

The research sought to examine how libraries chose priorities and structured their programs, how the efforts were implemented, how they worked with partners, and the instructional resources they used.

Choosing program priorities:

- **The model Digital Navigator approach presents an integrated solution to problems of owning appropriate devices, having and maintaining adequate connectivity, and possessing the literacy skills to accomplish what one needs to do.** Building on years of research and program analysis, the Digital Navigator idea integrates all the elements that can lead communities to become digitally competent. It can take years to assemble the component pieces that satisfy the integrated approach. Models such as the early Salt Lake City program illustrate the time- and resource-intensive nature of such undertakings.
- **Most libraries focused on digital literacy training and giving away or loaning devices, especially hotspots, as cornerstones for their programs.** During the pandemic, having access to a laptop or tablet or smartphone escalated in importance because so many services and social and work interactions became digital. Obtaining some sort of device was a widespread response across the country, and the libraries found that people were not as intent on checking out or receiving computing devices because they already had them. However, the need for connectivity remained strong: connectivity continues to be unreliable or unaffordable for many households in Texas.
- **Many libraries developed their Digital Navigator program around the needs of people already using the library rather than recruiting patrons from other settings.** The Digital Navigator model urges that providers, whether libraries or other organizations, examine local communities and assess needs systematically using various data sources and partnerships. This should yield targeted populations who would be the objects of outreach and marketing. While the smaller libraries in this grant program examined census data to determine the status of the local digital divide, most of them targeted people already coming into the library for their programs. Assessing local community needs in systematic or statistical terms was challenging for many libraries, and this affected outreach and marketing

efforts. The two largest libraries had the benefit of more localized data that enabled them to target specific neighborhoods in their cities.

- **Senior adults were a common user group for these programs.** Seniors are a critical target for digital inclusion efforts and frequently require assistance with affordable connections, devices, and instruction. The library-based training and some in-home or in-organization classes reached seniors in convenient settings. Seniors responded favorably to these efforts. This group in particular also realized social benefits within the context of the library and instructional classes.
- **Libraries continue to provide a valuable and essential service as a public space for information access, especially in an increasingly digital world. Their histories and the public confidence they command mark them as important pieces in policies addressing digital inclusion.** Libraries' social infrastructure enabled them to offer trusted services to populations that might be difficult to reach. Their assets include strong local social capital and personnel who understand local communities.
- **While libraries can be a crucial site to bridge the digital divide, their capabilities must be supported within the context of their resources and mission.** The Texas libraries receiving the grants are all different, serving different populations and emphasizing unique internal strengths while also operating within unique institutional settings. Communities' "digital readiness" varied, and this in turn influenced how program elements could unfold. Some libraries had to focus on improving local internet connectivity while others emphasized getting devices to populations that lacked them, while still others used their funding to offer digital literacy instruction. A one-size-fits-all model did not materialize across their locations. Rather, each library chose to focus on what made the most sense given their resources and local needs.
- **The terms of success differed from place to place.** While TSLAC gathered routine data such as numbers of people served, that metric does not capture outcomes such as increased goodwill and social capital among people receiving services, the value of the new capabilities acquired by people in the program, improved staff confidence and administrative capabilities, and opportunities to expand the range of patrons and the types of services that can position libraries for new futures.

Implementation aspects:

- **Some impediments to launching these programs were beyond the control of individual libraries.** For example, procurement processes, the short grant timeline, and the effects of the pandemic on hiring figured into some frustrating aspects of the programs. For those libraries that intended to hire new staff, the one-year appointment and absence of guaranteed benefits were disadvantageous.
- **Finding and training the right staff and mobilizing sufficient organizational support (within accounting or IT, for example) sometimes proved challenging.** Smaller libraries often found it more efficient and effective to use internal staff to develop digital literacy training either through classes or one-on-one appointments and to mobilize partnerships. Only one library adopted the Digital Navigator approach of having dedicated staff available

solely for assisting patrons on an as-needed basis; others embraced the efficiency of group classes or appointments to optimize time management.

Working with instructional resources:

- **Building a community of practice and providing training materials were helpful to many libraries.** Using monthly cohort meetings to convene staff associated with the ten projects, TSLAC was able to offer pragmatic support to the grantees, who shared best practices and questions in these forums. Participants appreciated the insights offered by other sites, and the opportunity to air difficulties and solicit solutions.
- **Training materials and instructional support provided by contractor Literacy Minnesota were helpful for about half the sites, but others found the materials and the content less desirable for their communities.** Libraries indicated it was a useful resource for instructors in particular, who would tailor materials to their students. People in instructional settings wanted social interaction, and they wanted content that addressed their more immediate needs rather than computer and software basics that comprise a lot of Literacy Minnesota's instructional modules. Two sites wanted materials available in Spanish. Many libraries did use the materials during the first year when they were free but were not able to continue with the service after the grant term ended, when it would cost them directly.

Identifying and working with local partners and constituencies:

- **Equipment donation programs became helpful ways to reach new constituencies.** Some programs reached out to local nonprofits or faith-based institutions to reach households that might need either equipment or instruction. Equipment became a gateway to requests for literacy training (i.e., how to use it).
- **Narrowing the digital divide cannot be solved by libraries alone.** Some of the libraries that forged successful partnerships did so by reaching out to a large variety of local organizations, and in many cases those organizations provided access to people who wanted training and/or devices. Libraries may not be as well suited for solving home-based connectivity, a bigger problem requiring local advocacy skills, new physical infrastructure and possibly new regulations. Loaned hotspots did help with connectivity.
- **Partnerships varied significantly across each of the ten libraries with some creating new partnerships and others strengthening current ones.** Some anticipated partnerships did not materialize, but others developed – sometimes serendipitously – across the grant's duration. One legacy of the program may be a greater awareness of both the work involved in establishing partnerships and the advisability of being open minded about where partnerships might occur.

Major recommendations

- **The Digital Navigator approach is holistic, with many moving parts. A longer timeframe for developing programs would be helpful to tackle all of its components.** Uniformly, all grantees reported the one-year timeframe was too brief. As well, procurement matters delayed equipment purchases. A longer timeframe combined with information and grant processing needs could ease this process.
- **Provide incentives for internal buy-in on elements of the grant such as purchasing a digital literacy resource package** like Literacy Minnesota’s Northstar or other programs. While several libraries thought the materials provided were helpful, especially to instructors, the cost of continuing with them was prohibitive in most cases.
- **Consider ways to provide assistance on undertaking needs assessments and capturing outcomes.** Most of the needs assessments libraries assembled as required by the grant proposal were cursory. Few libraries did much with the information they gathered. There may be room to help libraries target more effectively, and to market to identified constituencies. TSLAC could survey different regions or settings, for example, to assess community digital readiness and share more nuanced information with targeted libraries.
- **Assessing local needs should drive library efforts.** While statewide surveys regarding residents’ digital skills could be useful heuristics for understanding needs, a more functional assessment would need to be highly focused on specific regions if libraries are to act on that information.
- **Develop tools that libraries could use with ease as mechanisms to assess aspects of their programs.** Most libraries had not examined their accomplishments in terms that would allow them to pinpoint what “worked” and what did not in terms of curriculum or other activities.
- **Consider the unique needs of seniors by developing outreach suggestions and specialized instructional materials designed with adult seniors’ typical interests in mind.** This population is a priority in the digital divide scheme.
- **Consider ways that libraries might implement a dedicated Digital Navigator position, one that is separable from more routine library positions and focuses primarily or exclusively on digital inclusion patron needs.** Those needs may entail figuring out connectivity options, accomplishing certain tasks, or training people on software programs. These individuals could maintain focus on digital literacy/Digital Navigation tasks and not perform “normal” or routine librarian duties.
- **Cohort meetings were useful but organize some of them into smaller cohorts of similar libraries, small, rural, larger and urban, for example.** A related recommendation from the libraries is to address types of instructional needs for one-on-one approaches, or classroom style approaches.

- **Use the current grant recipients as mentors for subsequent libraries wishing to embark on Digital Navigator programs.** This may reduce a lot of the uncertainty libraries experience with this new approach to digital inclusion.
- **Cohort meetings could be organized with an agenda pre-circulated so that attendees know the purpose of each meeting.** Consistency in agenda and purpose of meeting, so that attendees know what to expect, was desired by program staff.
- **Tackle the problem of supporting staff hires that can continue past the duration of a grant.** This may require certain provisions in a grant application, or opportunities for continuation grants for successful projects so that staff can remain employed.
- **A future Request For Proposals could adopt different requirements depending on the capacity of library systems.** The differences between small and large libraries in terms of their bureaucracies and grant handling suggest that grant requirements could be structured to insure appropriate awareness and acceptance from relevant units. Being sensitive to different needs of different organizations in terms of actual grant applications and implementation processes could help to smooth Digital Navigator approaches. For example, explicitly carving out a role for IT staff to affirm certain needs or requirements could be helpful in the long term.
- **Cultivate digital awareness and readiness among libraries before they can apply to a digital navigator grant.**
- **TSLAC could consider how to structure grant offerings to maximize impact in domains that it prioritizes.** The grant application process was affected by opportunities to apply to two other grants simultaneously, one focused on telehealth and one more open-ended. Having three opportunities available at once may not be optimal for tackling digital inclusion goals.
- **Provide support on outreach and marketing efforts to increase reach and impact.** The resource guide provided separately may be helpful in this regard. The National Digital Inclusion Alliance doubtless will remain an excellent resource.
- **Provide venues for libraries in proximate geographies to connect with one another.** This could assist with creating communities of practice.

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INTRODUCTION

This report investigates the factors influencing the success of the grant-funded digital navigator efforts at ten Texas libraries. The motivating factors driving the research include the growing nationwide interest in the “Digital Navigator” model and increasing attention to remedying the digital divide. The digital divide is a shorthand term denoting the gap between people with ready connectivity and the online skills and device access to do whatever is needed.¹ In 2021 the Texas State Library created a grant opportunity to enable libraries to develop Digital Navigator programs to launch this service configuration within the state’s public libraries. In this sense, it represents a test of how to adopt and adapt a model that has received a great deal of national attention in the face of growing recognition of digital inclusion needs.

Over the past two decades, research has documented the gaps between people in metro areas and rural areas with respect to connectivity (Whitacre et al., 2014; Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2016; Horrigan, Whitacre, and Galperin, 2023); it also has documented efforts to cultivate digital literacy, to improve broadband connectivity, to provide affordable online access and to enable people to obtain the help with online activities of all sorts. Such endeavors have taken center stage in many policies enacted at the State and Federal levels in the 2020’s, leading toward the concept of digital navigation.

We highlight some of the research around broadband access and affordability, digital readiness and literacy and then turn to the Digital Navigator model framework, epitomized by Salt Lake City’s efforts. Our research approach, findings and conclusions follow.

Access and Affordability

Access to the internet remains a problem in the U.S. Estimates from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) indicate 14.5 million Americans do not have a high-speed fixed internet connection

¹ See NTIA, 1995 for early representation of a digital divide; NTIA’s 1998 Report updates this early rural-urban comparison (NTIA, 1995; 1998).

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(FCC, date). The Pew Research Center recently found that 23% of Americans do not have broadband at home (Pew, 2021). For rural regions, Internet Service Providers may simply be absent: those areas lack the population density that makes it attractive for our market-driven connectivity system to create the needed infrastructure. Alternatively, there may be internet connectivity, but it is slower and lower quality, discouraging people from paying for it. Metropolitan areas typically do have some service possibilities, but it may be beyond what people can afford. Affordability challenges likewise are shared by rural populations.

While the proportion of Americans who have high-speed internet is growing, nearly a quarter do not have home access, primarily for affordability reasons (Horrihan, 2020). As home broadband subscriptions have plateaued, using smartphones for access the internet has risen. A Pew study documented the growing dependence on smartphones for non-home broadband subscribers. As of 2020, one-in-five adults (19%) said that their smartphones did everything they need to do online, obviating the need for a fixed line home subscription (Pew, 2019). It is common for people to use multiple devices to connect to the internet, and each comes with costs and trade-offs in terms of functionality. Significantly, public libraries offer devices and connectivity that are free, and also may provide assistance and/or digital training. Indeed, libraries embraced public access to computers and the internet beginning in the 1990s.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought renewed awareness of the impact of the digital divide. As work, school, and other aspects of daily life moved to digital platforms, those without reliable, high-speed internet at home or the necessary digital skills were more likely to struggle financially and/or educationally. This digital exclusion heightens wealth and income gaps already felt by many Texans (Texas Broadband Development,2022). In response to this issue, the federal government passed the Digital Equity Act in 2021 to fund state level digital inclusion efforts. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which aims to subsidize household internet access and provide devices for households below the poverty line, is the flagship element from the Act.² It is estimated that up to 19% of Texas households qualify for ACP

² ACP allows households at 200 percent or more under the poverty line to obtain some form of subsidy. See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1841/text>, (<https://www.fcc.gov/acp>).

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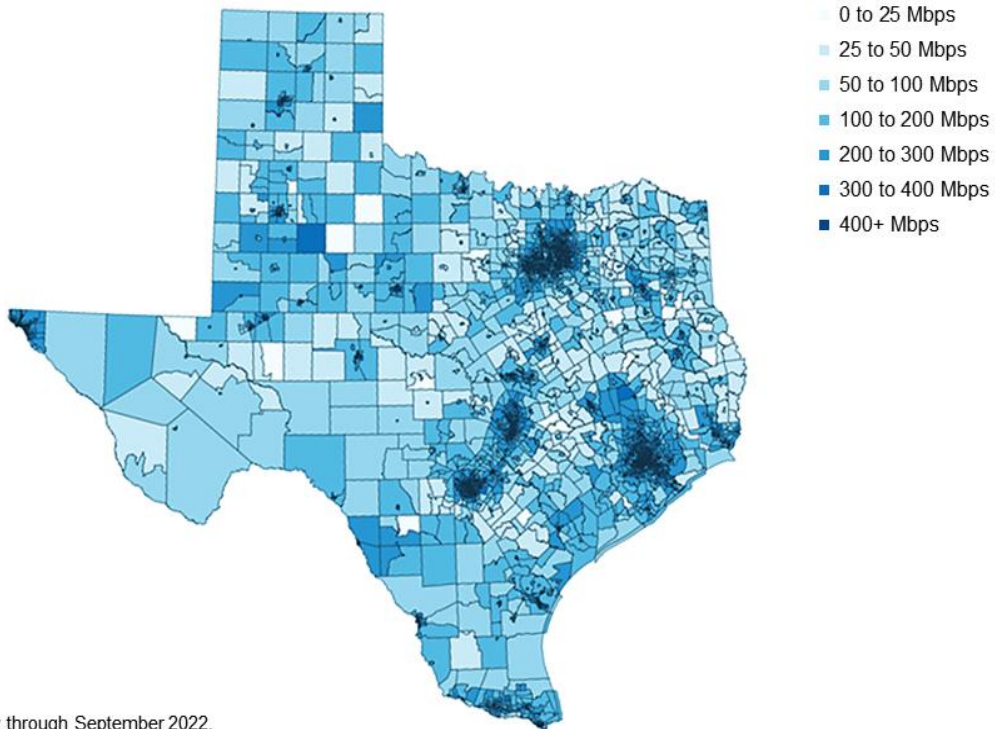
assistance but at this writing only about 13 percent of eligible households have signed up for the benefit (Federal Reserve, 2023). Also, there are several challenges with implementing the ACP. Monthly internet cost per household remains high even with the subsidy, and the process of signing up is complicated and cumbersome. Both of these are real deterrents preventing households from accessing home connectivity.

Figure 1 maps the mean download speeds in Texas. Connection speed is important for a few reasons: certain applications perform better when there is more bandwidth available to them (for example, streaming video requires more bandwidth than sending emails); when there are multiple users in the same household, the effective speed available to any single user diminishes. COVID-era requirements to work or join school from home demonstrated speed constraints even in households with a broadband subscription. The map illustrates *household* broadband speeds; we normally would expect institutional services to operate at higher bandwidths. The map suggests regions of the state where broadband access appears to be slow or inadequate which in turn highlights the potentially even greater needs that public libraries might face in those geographies.

We bring this up in part because libraries are typically expected to have higher speed connections. Indeed, even though the current FCC standard for “acceptable” broadband is set at 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds, its current broadband mapping efforts consider locations to be “served” if they have a maximum speed that is equal to or greater than 100/20 Mbps down/up.

The FCC’s E-Rate program, which subsidizes connectivity for schools and libraries, adopted a bandwidth target of 100 Mbps for libraries that serve fewer than 50,000 people, and a target of at least 1 Gbps for larger communities, as of 2014. In Texas, however, many libraries lack connectivity that meets the FCC expectations. New even higher speed thresholds are expected in coming years. These are important in order to provide high quality services within communities, and they signal libraries’ centrality in the broader community setting where free and capable internet connectivity should be expected, and usable by all.

Figure 1 Mean Download speed in Texas, 2022



NOTE: Data are from July through September 2022.
SOURCES: Ookla; authors' calculations.

Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas

Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2023 <https://www.dallasfed.org/cd/pubs/2023/23dilandscape1>

While basic connectivity and broadband quality are typically poorer in rural regions, affordability issues affect all Texans, both in metro and nonmetro regions. The Texas Broadband Development Office established the goal of improving affordability for 3.6 million households in the state, defining that goal based on households with incomes of under \$50,000 (Texas Broadband Development Office, 2022, p. 22).³ That said, Horrigan, Whitacre and Galperin (2023) point out that a better term to describe affordability problems may be “broadband vulnerable,” referring to households that may lose services when they face economic difficulties; they note that about half of lower income households (those with annual incomes of \$50,000 or less) searched for a cheaper plan, found it difficult to maintain a subscription, or were disconnected at some point. One national survey from 2021 shows that 18% of households lost connectivity during the pandemic because of inability to pay their internet costs (Horrigan, 2021).

³ The office assumed households would spend \$80.00 on broadband (p. 22).

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The Affordable Connectivity Program was created at the national level to continue the assistance provided during the pandemic under the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, a subsidy of \$50 per month for internet subscriptions available to people facing economic hardship due to COVID-19. EBB was succeeded by the Affordable Connectivity Program, which provides about a \$30 per month subsidy to qualified households plus a device subsidy of \$100.00.⁴

Libraries became important sites for promoting awareness of the ACP, and some even facilitated sign-ups. As will become apparent later in this report, solving the affordability and related device access problems became part of the Digital Navigator approach. The EBB technically has ended, while ACP is continuing and may even be extended by Congress in 2024. Both programs offer some lessons not only in how to structure subsidies but also how to generate awareness of these benefits. For example, analyses of the uptake in free or discount offers epitomized by EBB opportunities showed that only 23% of targeted low and lower-middle income respondents in one national survey had heard of the EBB. A higher percentage, 32%, had heard about local public libraries increasing their Wi-Fi signals, enabling more people to go online (Horrigan, 2021). Local public libraries also were more highly trusted to provide information about programs such as ACP, according to the same survey. Finally, regions with public libraries had stronger ACP enrollment, a type of ‘library effect’ (Horrigan, 2022) in terms of both awareness and use of the program. These data suggest that libraries are very well positioned to catalyze the ingredients needed to promote broader use of the internet.⁵

Digital Readiness and Libraries

Digital readiness refers to the ability of communities or populations to make use of broadband connectivity. Discussions of readiness often reference America’s surprisingly low worldwide standing in digital skills

⁴ Eligibility is contingent on household income and participating in one of several public assistance programs already.

⁵ Horrigan finds a 6% higher ACP enrollment in zip codes with a public library compared to those without.

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training and adoption, leading to broader discussions of workforce improvements and best practices for improving national competitiveness.⁶

Digital divide statistics have created new roles and even obligations for libraries in terms of assisting with broad digital readiness. Recognizing the digital divide and information gaps more broadly, libraries provide in-library computers with internet access for those who lack such resources at home, and many if not most offer Wi-Fi connectivity so that people may bring their own devices, and some provide connectivity outside of the walls of the library building and even after hours, a community service that became especially important during the pandemic in the US. They have introduced "maker spaces" or "tech petting areas," (Willett, 2016), and often initiated digital training classes. Such offerings reflect the library's responsiveness to the changing demands and interests of its users and hint at ways to redefine ideas about access as well. Digital readiness means leveraging existing community resources, and libraries have been singled out as having a foundational role in providing digital navigator services, in consolidating equipment purchases, in helping unemployed and underemployed people learn new digital skills, in creating awareness of assistance options, among other functions (FCC, 2023).

Federal Initiatives and TX State Broadband Office

The federal government has invested in building infrastructure or delivering digital literacy services in many ways, and this has been the case for years. Creating the e-rate program as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act acknowledged the important role of schools and libraries, called anchor institutions, as sites where high-quality connectivity would pay dividends within communities. In Texas, a short-lived Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund also invested in connectivity needs within the state from 1995 to 2003, using funds generated from an assessment on Texans' telephone bills. The federal government provided an infusion of funds under the Obama Administration when it launched the twin

⁶ Datanami (2022). *Coursera Report Ranks Global Skills in Business, Tech, and Data Science*. <https://www.datanami.com/2022/06/16/coursera-report-ranks-global-skills-in-business-techand-data-science/>

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Broadband Infrastructure Program, administered by federal agency NTIA, and the Broadband Initiatives Program administered by the US Department of Agriculture.

However, the broadband investment opportunities generated by the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act signed into law in 2021 dwarf these efforts. One component of the Act reserves \$42.45 billion for Broadband Equity, Access and Development (BEAD). As of 2023, Texas is awarded \$3.3 billion from that fund by the federal agency NTIA to expand broadband. While most of the funding will support physical infrastructure, some will support school- and library-based digital literacy and training services. TSLAC also received \$7.8 million through a Library Infrastructure and Facility Access Improvement Grant from the U.S. Department of the Treasury in order to assist libraries' access to broadband and to develop related services⁷ and the agency is identified in the Texas Digital Opportunity Plan as a key partner in the state's plan to advance digital opportunities (Texas Broadband Development Office, 2023).

The recent broadly based investments in infrastructure and digital skills development reflect both an awareness that a digital divide exists and that more of our daily life functions rely on connectivity of some sort. Digital systems are penetrating the most routine activities spanning our entertainment, social relationships, work, education, health services and more. That gradual shift in delivery models for services and information requires one to be digitally literate – and connected – in order to maneuver in contemporary society.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy has many definitions. The concept itself has grown over time, even as have the digital platforms and devices with which one now routinely interacts. Each new platform or device expands notion of literacy. While originally applied to a desktop computer environment, digital literacy may now mean up- and downloading photos from one's mobile phone, using social media safely, or creating online content.

Definitions become important when crafting policy programs because they suggest goals and standards. As conceptualizations of Internet and computer literacy documented the fact that simple

⁷ The Texas State Broadband Office supported this grant (TSLAC, 2023).

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connectivity did not erase digital divides (the first-level digital divide), researchers examined the factors influencing peoples' use of and satisfaction with online interactions, sometimes called the second-level digital divide. Hargittai (2012) and Van Dijk (2020), for example developed specific scales that indicate computer literacy and explored instrumental capabilities needed in order to accomplish certain goals online. The notion of skills and uses prompted the policy response of offering more formal training programs in schools, libraries and other institutions.

However, there are categories of needs and uses that may fall outside of the typical approaches in formal computer literacy courses. A third-level divide recognizes that online uses and outcomes contribute in many different ways to peoples' well-being. It acknowledges that economic, cultural, social and individual benefits are all valuable – and often necessary – products of online interactions (Helsper, 2015). For example, it may be more important to some people to be able to complete online job applications than it is to learn how to use a formal spreadsheet program like Excel or a formal word processing system. Similarly, it may be more important to some people to recognize online spam than it is to master Photoshop. Such needs, often called 'meaningful use,' acknowledge that literacy efforts need to meet people where their interests reside. This more complicated and nuanced definition of digital literacy is behind the Digital Navigator policy response since it attempts to adapt to peoples' unique needs.

A 2022 report that TSLAC commissioned, *Texas Public Libraries: Serving Communities to Enhance Digital Literacy*, provides a quantitative overview of what many libraries across the state are doing to promote digital literacy (Bureau of Business Research, 2022). Based on a survey of 240 library leaders as well as 32 interviews with library directors and 14 branch managers in metropolitan regions, the report documents that most libraries in the sample offered one-on-one help and training with computers and other digital devices (mobile phones or tablets or e-readers), both on scheduled and spontaneous service models. About 40% of the branches and 22% of the main libraries also offered formal classes, with basic computer skills topping the list of topics offered. The survey results showed that seniors were key constituencies for digital assistance, with limited-English speakers and children following closely behind in terms of the user targets for instructional efforts. The report notes that few public libraries offered formal classes or one-on-

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one assistance with more advanced questions. As well, only 20% reported partnerships with community organizations such as schools, local workforce groups, or nonprofits.

Two striking aspects of the survey in terms of our focus on digital navigation were first, the overwhelming endorsement within the survey sample of one-on-one assistance as the preferred “teaching” mode for digital literacy, and second, the limited percentage of libraries with community partnerships. We highlight this because the smaller libraries developing Digital Navigator services under their TSLAC grant commented on the staff capacity challenges the dedicated one-on-one model incurs: with limited staff, having at least one person consistently available on an ‘as needed’ basis was difficult simply because smaller libraries employ fewer people. Second, the Digital Navigator framework endorsed nationally relies on community partnerships. As will become clear, establishing meaningful partnership is a difficult and long term endeavor. We address both the matter of dedicated patron assistance for digital literacy and the issue of establishing partnerships later in our report.

THE TEXAS STATE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES COMMISSION DIGITAL NAVIGATOR GRANT PROGRAM

When it formulated its request for proposals, TSLAC’s grant program used the outlines of what had emerged as classic elements of digital navigation, based on years of research and practice on the issues of access, affordability digital readiness and digital literacy. The approach took shape from efforts of the national nonprofit National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) and trailblazer library systems such as the Salt Lake City Public Library and the Connecticut State Library.⁸

TSLAC’s Funding Opportunity Background

The TSLAC NOFO asked applicants to focus on several core components critical to the success and implementation of the Digital Navigators program including (1) a community needs assessment; (2) a

⁸ NDIA reports that it assisted the Salt Lake City Public Library to pilot Digital Navigator programs in 2021, and it subsequently developed webinars and materials about the approach (NDIA, 2021; CT State Library, 2021).

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project purpose that included identifying outside partners, how the project would be a fit to the community, and how the applicant library would meet the needs of vulnerable community members; (3) sustainability plans, including financial and managerial resources and potential partnerships to support the project.⁹ The grant program was structured so that the community needs assessment would identify a specific, targeted population within an applicant's community. This group may not necessarily be routine library patrons but individuals who need digital literacy and connectivity support. It was anticipated that outside partners would assist with access to targeted populations and augment library staff capabilities; they could provide a variety of services including identifying potential patrons, providing financial assistance, devices, volunteers, or digital literacy education. Applicants were invited to describe strategies to reach the intended population. This could include traditional marketing methods, such as TV commercials or newspaper ads, social media outreach, or door to door or other outreach. The one-year grant program requested quarterly updates from recipients.

TSLAC provided support to grantees in the form of monthly cohort meetings with grantee representatives and access to digital literacy content through a partnership with [Literacy Minnesota](#), a St. Paul-based organization providing virtual digital literacy consultation and training resources to TSLAC as well as access to its Northstar Digital Literacy training materials. Literacy Minnesota provided one part-time staff person to the Texas effort; this individual worked entirely from Minnesota.

All ten applicants who applied for this grant received it. We point this out because it was somewhat unexpected – according to the program manager at the time, more applications were anticipated. However, TSLAC had issued three grant opportunities simultaneously, and the other two included a more conventional opportunity for support (26 grants awarded) and for telehealth (4 grants awarded). The volume of grant opportunities may have affected the volume and composition of the applications. The Notice of Funding Opportunity is in Appendix D.

⁹ Available at

<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ldn/arpa/digitalnavigators#:~:text=Digital%20Navigators%20are%20individuals%20who,navigators%20and%20purchase%20necessary%20devices>

Constructing a Digital Navigator Program: The Salt Lake City Model

The Salt Lake City Public Library system initiated a useful model for digital navigator programs, and the Texas State Libraries and Archives Commission was aware of that program and used its outlines as a model in its Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Examining the history of Salt Lake City's efforts shows that many developments were in place in Salt Lake that enhanced their program's success, and those advances unfolded over many years of work.

For example, libraries had been grappling with digital inclusion previously for several years and had access to trained staff when they launched their digital navigator efforts. The pandemic spotlighted the need for digital inclusion services and highlighted persistent digital inequities (Digital Navigators Toolkit, 2021), and the library system needed to serve thousands of people who needed connectivity quickly, contributing to a rollout of Digital Navigator services. That said, the Salt Lake Library system had a solid base of digital inclusion initiatives, augmented by partnerships, prior to the pandemic. The system had partnered earlier with the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to address the local digital divide (Digital Navigators Toolkit, 2021). The latter federal agency awarded the system a \$411,000 grant in 2020 to develop the digital navigator model.

Several operational advantages are evident in the Salt Lake system. It hired people who already had experience as Digital Navigators from the outset. When it launched its Digital Navigators in 2020 as a pilot project to offer individualized digital inclusion services comprising connectivity assistance, device assistance, and basic digital skills support over the phone, it built on the training contributions from the ULC (Digital Navigators Toolkit, 2021). They also responded to calls for support and assessed the needs of their community, arriving at a goal of supporting 450 low-income and/or senior Salt Lake City residents over a six-month period (Digital Navigators Toolkit, 2021). As the pandemic wore on, services from the Digital Navigators' direct service in mid-July 2021 reached 585 individuals over the course of its 10-month program, exceeding the initial goal of 450 people.

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Digital Navigators addressed the digital inclusion process through repeated interactions and an integrated approach spanning connectivity, devices, and skills elements. Device needs were addressed when librarians loaned laptops, digital media equipment and Wi-Fi hotspots. Their program provided greater access to computers, as well as internet, electronic resources, and digital skills. The needs assessment mentioned earlier found two zip codes as the areas in greatest need; U.S. Census data illustrated that 3,131 households or 22% lacked home broadband subscriptions of any kind, and another 1,927 (13%) had home internet access only through mobile data plans (Digital Navigators Toolkit, 2021). Those geographic areas were highly targeted by their program.

The Salt Lake City library system learned that ongoing support and relationships matter, and building strong relationships would be more effective in the long run. Certain techniques, such as blocking time for appointments, were useful. Participant feedback suggested that people became more confident in their skills after longer interactions in consultations, and that digital literacy skills varied for different devices. As the pandemic demonstrated around the country, remote services reach individuals who are not able to access in-person services, and building that capability became important. Librarians also noted a high need for devices and affordable home broadband service. The program achieved an expanded awareness of library services among the general public, and the Digital Navigator program specifically found that letting people know about services was critical to success. Successful strategies for outreach included canvassing neighborhoods, partnering with organizations and spreading the word through community events.

This model of a Digital Navigator program had many moving parts and represented a broad constellation of resources that were both external to the library (federal funding from IMLS, for example) and internal to its operation in terms of staff and materials. It took shape on years of building partnerships and deepening organizational understanding of the dimensions of the local digital divide, accomplishments both systematic and measured. Salt Lake City's program has become a model. However, the essential elements had not hatched fully formed; rather, they took shape after substantial funding and trials.

Consequently, while the core elements may be known, enabling them to work well in different settings and unique time frames complicates any easy applicability of those ingredients.

RESEARCH PLAN AND MAJOR QUESTIONS

Research Approach

Our research investigates how the ten libraries receiving TSLAC grants developed their Digital Navigator programs. We gathered data in 2023, after the grant term had officially ended. Core research questions include:

1. How did grantees choose their program priorities as reflected in how they spent their award funding and in their internal discussions and decision-making?
2. How did the ten grantees implement their programs? What were their problems, successes, and challenges? This includes marketing and outreach, hiring, procurement (of tablets, hotspots, computers and other materials) and other factors.
3. How did grantees identify and work with local partners and constituencies?
4. How did the grantees work with Literacy Minnesota, their instructional resource? What were the strengths and weaknesses of that arrangement?

Our approach relies on several data sources. First, we conducted interviews with the library directors, one former director, the people who wrote the grants, those who directed them, and library-based digital navigators and instructors. We had virtual meetings with staff at most sites in order to get preliminary ideas about their programs, and we followed up later with our in-person visits, re-interviewing people, highlighting certain questions, and adding additional interviewees. We re-contacted some people for elaboration or when additional questions came up. We also interviewed the grant managers at TSLAC in order to understand the program's original goals and intentions as well as the Literacy Minnesota representative who assisted with the programs. We transcribed all interviews (approximately 40 recorded

Digital Navigators

interviews) and coded them for themes using the qualitative software program atlas.ti. (See the codebook in Appendix C.)

Qualitative data is useful for understanding how processes unfold, and for these libraries, embarking on a Digital Navigator program meant not just a new service for patrons, but also grappling with internal procedures involving procurement, hiring and staffing, and insuring the appropriate people in the library management structure endorsed the projects. Because we spoke with people shortly after the official time period of the grant had ended, the problems that had come up, the solutions that libraries devised, and success stories and some of the challenges were fresh.

We conducted in-person visits at all ten sites, sometimes observing instructors working with clients and walking through the spaces used to deliver navigator services. Prior to those efforts, we read through all of the quarterly reports filed by the grantees and viewed the recorded “cohort” meetings that TSLAC’s then-grant manager had held monthly. We attended the last two of those meetings. We reviewed instructional materials from the sites when they were available. We also gathered data about the respective communities served by the ten libraries.

The basic Digital Navigator framework guided the Notice of Funding. As Figure 2 illustrates, that framework includes an understanding of local needs and creating local partnerships that can mobilize components of the service, whether that entails providing devices such as hotspots or Chromebooks, a training space, access to a population that needs services, or assistance with enrolling people in a connectivity subsidy program such as the Affordable Connectivity Program. Achieving improved digital inclusion is a product of multiple types of services. While all applicants had to address the relevant components of the NOFO, operationally some emphasized certain elements over others. The reasoning behind certain choices and the processes that made sense to different libraries underscore the important role of context in examining Digital Navigator programs: we saw no one-size-fits-all outcome here.

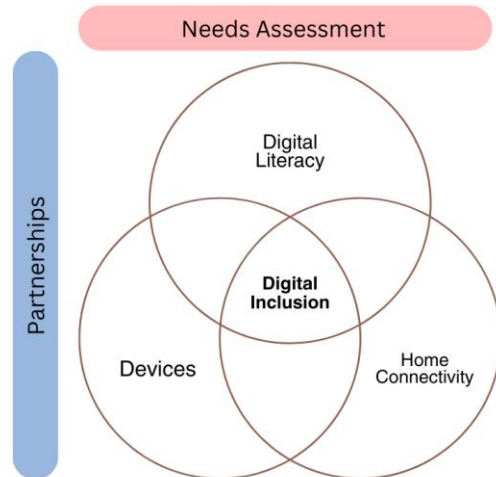


Figure 2 The Digital Navigator Framework

Background on the Digital Navigator libraries

Eight of the ten Texas sites were somewhat rural, and many had relatively high poverty rates. Table 1 below summarizes some of the pertinent data by community. Overall, the ten libraries receiving Digital Navigator grants included a mix of larger, highly urban and multi-branch libraries in Austin and Harris County; medium sized cities including Brownsville and Mercedes in South Texas and Lubbock in the Northwest; and smaller or more rural libraries in central and north Texas. We gathered summary information on community digital needs or readiness as measured by Digital Distress. The Digital Distress statistic is a composite indicator that captures a county’s digital service quality¹⁰ (Gallardo and St. Germain, 2022), and signals existing or potential digital divides since it measures percentage of homes with no internet access, households relying on mobile devices only for internet access, and those lacking computing devices. Harris County and Austin, for example, exhibited low Digital Distress, as did Lubbock. Clear signals of digital distress are indicated in Valley locations Brownsville and Mercedes, in eastern Caldwell

¹⁰ Digital distress is based on four variables from the U.S. Census American Community Survey: 1) the percent of homes with no internet access, 2) using only cellular data, as well as 3) the percent of homes relying on mobile devices only, or 4) having no computing devices.

Digital Navigators

County’s Martindale, and in the Dublin Public Library’s Erath county. These factors underscore the local needs and opportunities for library assistance with digital inclusion since libraries typically offer high speed

Table 1 Sites and Community Descriptions

SITES (county)	Size (# of branches)	RRI*	Digital Distress**	Median Household Income by County	***Poverty Rate (%) (County)	Grant Amount
Austin Public Library (Travis)	22	.32	Low	82,605	12	\$237,481
Brownsville Public Library (Cameron)	2	.38	High	44,440	27.9	\$80,000
Hector Garcia Memorial Library (Hidalgo)	1	.36	High	46,653	30.0	\$69,950
Harris County Public Library (Harris)	29	.18	Low	61,906	16.5	\$295,643
Dublin Public Library (Erath)	1	.52	High	61,453	18.1	\$69,302
Lakehills Area Library (Bandera)	1	.54	Moderate	64,389	13.4	\$69,584
Lubbock Public Library (Lubbock)	4	.40	Low	56,477	17.6	\$69,426
Martindale Community Library (Caldwell)	1	.50	High	66,128	14.1	\$70,000
Pottsboro Library (Grayson)	1	.45	Moderate	59,554	12.3	\$66,626
Wilson	4	.51	Moderate	74,529	10.9	\$109,921

Digital Navigators

County Public Libraries (Wilson)						
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*RRI is an index of relative rurality. See <https://purr.purdue.edu/publications/2960/1>. “1” is highly rural, “0” is metro.

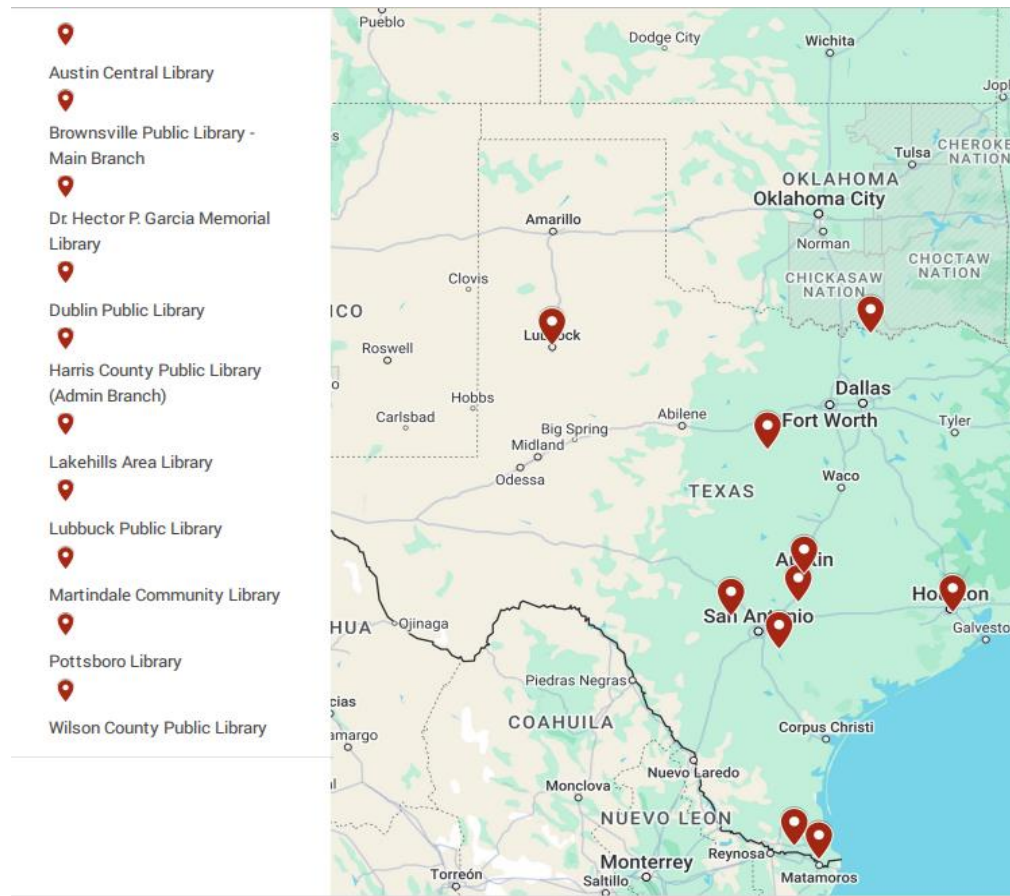
**Digital Distress is an index that combines indicators from the U.S. Census American Community Survey including the percent of homes lacking internet access, those using cellular data only, the percent of homes relying on mobile devices only or having no computing devices.

*** Poverty rates from <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/united-states/quick-facts/texas/percent-of-people-of-all-ages-in-poverty#table>.

connectivity, devices both for in-library use and sometimes for home use, and technical assistance. The Valley locations also are in counties with lower median household income and relatively higher poverty rates, which could suggest more difficulties affording both connectivity and devices and consequently greater need for library programs. That said, even wealthier communities such as Austin and Houston do not lack lower income populations in need of assistance with devices or the cost of connectivity or literacy.

Library size is important because it conveys something about decision-making layers and processes. Larger libraries have internal staff for accounting purposes, for example; multiple branch locations may create complications with respect to parity or staffing options. While smaller libraries may represent easier internal decision processes, staff capacity may be an issue. The institutional setting of library systems can invoke different layers of resource handling, a factor we take up in discussing implementation factors. Figure 3 illustrates their [approximate locations](#) in Texas.

Figure 3 Map of Digital Navigator Library Locations



THE DIGITAL NAVIGATOR PROGRAMS

We reproduce brief sketches of the ten library approaches and then address the program priorities, implementation, partnerships, use of instructional materials, and other relevant factors in the programs. As the brief summaries indicate, libraries were interested in supporting different aspects of digital inclusion from the outset, with some more focused on connectivity, some on launching classes, and some in having devices to loan or distribute. The grant program itself ran during the calendar year of 2022 when libraries and schools were still responding to the pandemic.

Program Outlines

In reviewing how the libraries mounted their Digital Navigator programs, both the requested dollar amount and the unique community goals figured into how each site chose to mount its program. The submitted

Digital Navigators

budgets suggest what communities might prioritize (Table 2). For instance, Harris County planned to spend most of its funding on staff; Brownsville intended to spend most of its allocation on computers or tablets. We note that many of these budgets changed over the course of the grant. (One grantee returned over half of its award.)

Table 2 Initial Budgets

Site	Total Award Amount	Salaries/ Wages/ Benefits	Travel	Supplies/ Materials	Equipment	Services
Wilson County	\$109,921	\$81,985	\$1,300	\$9,936		\$16,700
Brownsville	\$80,000	\$0	\$0	\$58,800		\$21,200
Dublin	\$69,302	\$10,196	\$0	\$50,805		\$2,000
Pottsboro	\$66,626	\$18,380	\$2,300	\$32,630		\$7,259
Harris County	\$295,643	\$241,556	\$0	\$7,200		\$20,000
Lakehills	\$68,584	\$0	\$0	\$56,747	\$3,250	\$3,250
Lubbock	\$69,426	\$12,000	\$0	\$52,682	\$0	\$3,744
Austin	\$237,481	\$70,000	\$0	\$46,091	\$0	\$99,800
Mercedes	\$69,950	\$32,971	\$0	\$19,500	\$0	\$16,163
Martindale	\$70,000	\$31,720	\$0	\$12,400	\$0	\$25,880

Certain contextual matters affected program plans and implementation. The pandemic was a major influence in terms of reinforcing awareness of digital connectivity needs and provisioning, but also in terms of conditioning the job market for these programs since most of them intended to hire people. We learned

Digital Navigators

that the employment market at that moment was difficult for the one-year hires supported by the grant, and many sites were unable to accomplish their intended staffing.

Second, while the grants were to operate for that single year, they sometimes intersected other plans and other programs. Examining the dynamics of the Digital Navigator program therefore invites a more holistic look at how libraries were dealing with other grants and with their longer-term plans. Sometimes intersections with other grants, for example, could have benefited (or did benefit) each other. In one example, Harris County planned to use the Digital Navigator grant to purchase devices and to use a different grant, the federal Emergency Connectivity Fund, to distribute hotspots and Chromebooks. However, the two grants ultimately did not coincide, and most devices were distributed before Digital Navigators were hired. In another case, multiple grants appeared to overwhelm the staff charged with implementing them and with internal business accounting staff.

Similarly, plans for tackling community needs evolve, and to the extent that this grant could assist in identifying needs through practice, continued work with communities might be set on a fortuitous, new trajectory. As one librarian reported at the close of the grant, “This has been one of the best learning experiences for me. I have better learned how to provide the programs that our patrons actually want and need and will attend. I have been able to reach out to the community through outreach and through networking and find out what the needs are that we can serve and how to send people to other groups that are already meeting those needs. We were able to advance on our technology education for the community in a meaningful and lasting way.”

Other contextual matters had to do with normal staff turnover that affected these grants. In one case, the person who wrote the grant proposal and had been responsible for its vision left the library. Other staff members did not have the background or the shared vision of what the grant might do for their site. In another instance, a key staff person left a few months before the one-year term was to be completed, and that prompted some employment challenges. These are normal institutional events, but with a very time delimited grant effort, the events perhaps had outsize impact.

Digital Navigators

Finally, there are outcomes of these programs that the Digital Navigator model does not capture. The social infrastructure that epitomizes libraries was mobilized in some cases, enabling groups of people learning together to do more than improve their digital literacy. Community, identity, friendship, and social support were in evidence. We take this up later in our remarks and turn now to how the ten libraries structured their programs, using the model elements in Table 3 after providing brief program descriptions. Program challenges are elaborated in the Implementation section of this report.

Program Descriptions

Austin Public Library

Austin Public Library (APL) was awarded \$237,381 from the Digital Navigator grant. Most of this funding went toward providing Digital Navigator staff salaries. APL struggled to implement the Digital Navigator grant because of the grant's short timeline and lack of internal buy-in from library staff. The Digital Navigator grant administrator described the program as laying the foundation for Austin Library branches to build upon in the future as needs arise. Their core program elements include marketing materials, general program assets, and introducing local library branches to central partners that they may not have had relationships with before. The administrator stated this year was about developing models and frameworks that other branches could utilize in the future.

The Little Walnut and Southeast branches were the most involved with the Digital Navigator and the Telehealth grants that the library also won, and these locations have sustained versions of the Digital Navigator program and hosted contractor efforts around Digital Navigation. Surprisingly, APL returned most of the money from the grant to TSLAC because community partners were able to donate devices and because they had hiring problems. APL intended to use most of the grant to hire Digital Navigators. The system posted 7-8 Digital Navigator positions at 20 hours a week but faced a competitive hiring environment and internal processing delays. Finding qualified candidates was difficult. APL interviewed a total of 15 candidates and hired three. Digital Navigator candidates were required to be familiar with the neighborhoods they would serve, be bilingual, and have some experience in remote instruction or teaching.

Digital Navigators

Out of the three, one candidate has remained as APL's permanent Digital Navigator beyond the term of the grant. After the grant ended, APL partnered with Austin Free-Net, a local nonprofit dedicated to digital equity and inclusion, to provide digital navigation services for the library system.

Brownsville Public Library

Brownsville Public Library was awarded \$80,000 from the Digital Navigator grant. Funding was allocated toward the purchase of devices for use at the library and for check-out, and for the extension of Northstar services beyond the one year. No funding was allocated for staff. Brownsville successfully used the Northstar materials and conducted classes as the core elements of their Digital Navigator program. The Brownsville Digital Navigator team included a grant manager and two library staff who took on the role of Digital Navigators part-time. Brownsville hosted classes at two library branches at different times. Classes were drop-in, with any patron able to join whether or not they had attended the previous classes. The classes focused on a variety of topics including Microsoft Word, email, and smartphones. Brownsville Public Library has sustained their program and continues to provide Digital Navigator classes. They have also continued their engagement with Literacy Minnesota's Northstar software for an additional year.

The main challenges with implementing the grant included city processes and adjusting to patron needs as the program unfolded. This was the first grant the grant's administrator sought out and obtained. Throughout the process, she learned how to advocate to city officials.

Dublin Public Library

Dublin Public Library was awarded \$69,302 in grant funding. Over \$50,000 of this was used to purchase devices for community members. The remaining funds were used to supplement the grant administrator's efforts and marketing efforts. Dublin's Digital Navigator program focused on providing devices to community members identified through key partners. Dublin's Digital Navigator grant manager leveraged established relationships with community partners and was able to reach individuals most in

Digital Navigators

need, such as single parents and others. The grant's administrator used these partners as a funnel to spread the word and vet potential participants of the program.

Dublin's program successfully provided devices to over 50 members of the community. This program also served a wide range of ages and use cases, with patrons needing devices for work, school, and general connectivity. To ensure the program reached the neediest population in Dublin, the library did not proactively advertise the Digital Navigator program but relied on word of mouth from partners and patrons.

Challenges include the reimbursement procurement process and the one-year time limit. Due to the one-year timeline, Dublin's library did not consider hiring additional staff as Digital Navigators. This had implications on how the program was structured because everything had to be achievable within one person's capacity. The reimbursement process also affected the turnaround time for providing devices. The grant administrator initially anticipated a one-month turnaround from the initial meeting with a patron to providing a device. The turnaround time was closer to three to four months.

Harris County Public Library

Harris County Public Library was awarded \$295,643 in grant funding, and over \$240,000 of these funds were used on staff salaries for hiring Digital Navigators. Harris County Public Library differed from most of the other grant recipients because of the large size of their library system and the diverse patron population. Harris hired Digital Navigators whose sole purpose was to provide digital assistance and guidance through one-on-one support. Originally, the Digital Navigators traveled to different locations but ended up spending most of their time at the Aldine and Barbara Bush locations. The Digital Navigators chose these locations based on library system data on computer and Wi-Fi usage.

Harris County Public Library system engaged regularly with one community partner in this endeavor, a church where they hosted digital literacy classes weekly. However, most patron engagement in the program was one-on-one, with individuals coming up and asking for help while they were at the library

Digital Navigators

or setting up individual appointments with a digital navigator. The most common help requests were accessing email, applying for jobs, and navigating government benefits websites.

The main challenges were hiring Digital Navigators, the short timing of the grant, and the additional internal processes of serving a large branch system. Two of the digital navigators remain as Harris County Library employees in different capacities. Digital Navigators were temporary positions lasting the length of the grant.

Lakehills Public Library

Lakehills Public Library was awarded \$68,584 in Digital Navigator grant funding. Over \$56,000 of these funds were used to purchase devices for community members. The Lakehills Public Library focused on giving laptops away to patrons who needed them, hosting weekly digital literacy classes, and establishing local community partners. The Digital Navigator grant became a catalyst for the library to connect with other community organizations. In order to ensure the laptops and connectivity devices were given to community members most in need, the Digital Navigator grant manager utilized partnerships to recruit individuals. Many of these partnerships were not established before the Digital Navigator grant was awarded. The creation of these partnerships is a successful outcome with continual impact. The Lakehills Library now meets regularly with these partners and is able to reach beyond the walls of the library to engage different community groups.

The weekly digital literacy classes did not have a formalized curriculum but based content on the concerns and questions of the attendees. The classes, held weekly on Mondays, typically consist of about 15 people, primarily over 60. Attendees formed a mini-community, with many of the same individuals showing up weekly and helping each other. Most of the classes focused on smartphone digital literacy.

Challenges with implementing and administrating the Digital Navigator grant included the short grant timeline and identifying the best way to provide digital literacy education.

Lubbock Public Library

Digital Navigators

Lubbock faced significant administrative challenges with launching their Digital Navigator program because the longstanding library director left at the beginning of the program. This director had the original vision for the grant and was responsible for drafting the goals and scope. A branch librarian taught the computer classes throughout the year but was not involved in crafting the grant goals and program. While the staff turnover was a challenge, Lubbock was still able to successfully purchase devices and provide computer classes at all four branches. One of the major successes of the program was Lubbock maxed out registration for the computer certificate classes and provided classes to over 80 people. Most of these individuals were not already patrons of the library and heard about the classes through local newspapers or television stations.

Lubbock used most of their \$79k allotted funds to purchase laptop devices for use in their libraries and reimburse librarian class time. In the initial proposal, there was an intention to launch a hotspot program, but that did not get implemented. A key reason for this is due to the staff turnover and the external and internal procurement delays. The major challenges for this program were the shorter timing of the grant prevented hiring additional staff. This put a strain on the single staff librarian involved because they hosted classes at all four locations. Uncertainty regarding what was expected of the grant was also a challenge as it further delayed the implementation and procurement of devices.

Martindale Community Library

Martindale is one of the smallest communities with a population of just over 1,700. The library is independent and sustained through a variety of grants. The 70k Digital Navigator grant was one of the largest sums of funding they have received. The grant was primarily used to pay library staff, purchase devices, and provide digital education to Martindale community members. The digital divide in Martindale is felt disparately by the Hispanic community. Many residents rely on the library for reliable Wi-Fi and general digital access.

Digital Navigators

Two of the main challenges were procurement timelines and drafting the goals of the Digital Navigator grant. While the library provides public Wi-Fi and Wi-Fi extenders to enable broader connectivity downtown, shifting from providing connectivity to providing devices was a significant change in the role of the library. Martindale's Digital Navigators recognized that many members of their community do not have access to a smart device, whether a phone or a computer. They decided to pair giving away devices with classes to ensure that community members would understand how to use the devices once provided. Developing the education was challenging because of the lack of staff and resources at Martindale. Procurement was also a challenge, primarily due to the reimbursement model. Martindale struggled to find the funds to make the initial purchase and had to make sure they would be reimbursed in a timely fashion. It used the services of an external vendor, CTN, for curriculum development.

Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Mercedes

Hector P. Garcia effectively used the Northstar materials provided by Literacy Minnesota, successfully hired and retained Digital Navigator staff, and hosted regularly scheduled digital literacy classes. Hector P. Garcia received \$69,950 in grant funding and distributed it primarily to Digital Navigator staff salaries and the purchase of 52 Chromebooks. Structured computer literacy classes based on Northstar were the foundation of their Digital Navigator program.

The Digital Navigators transformed the Northstar material into classroom-style content and added supplemental Spanish-speaking materials. Patrons were required to sign up before the courses began. At the end of the course, patrons were given a Chromebook to mark their graduation from the Digital Navigator program. The device acted as an incentive to complete the program. At the end of the grant, this library provided 48 devices. Hector P. Garcia has retained both Digital Navigators who continue to provide digital literacy classes several times a week in English and Spanish.

Initially, library staff planned to spread the word about the Digital Navigator program by door-knocking and other promotional campaigns. However, they did not end up pursuing this strategy because the classes filled up quickly with current library patrons. The grant administrators expressed excitement

Digital Navigators

over the popularity of the class but recognized they were not serving the entire community affected by the digital divide.

Pottsboro Library

This \$66K project aimed to provide one-on-one digital navigator services to Pottsboro community members. Most of the budget supported personnel costs, alongside some laptop purchases (10 machines) and four desktop computers, as well as the monthly costs of ten hotspots. In this small community of about 2600 people, the Digital Navigator program estimates that about 400 people were served, particularly through classes at various senior centers, community events in collaboration with partners, and one-on-one appointments with part-time Digital Navigators. The Digital Navigators who were hired worked with approximately 150 people through one-on-one appointments. One Digital Navigator has remained in his position with the Pottsboro Library and has appeared in marketing and ad campaigns promoting the program. Feedback from patrons has been very positive.

Wilson County Libraries

Wilson County Libraries were awarded \$109,921 through the Digital Navigator Grant, with the bulk of that funding allocated to supplementing staff salaries and hiring an additional librarian. The primary goals of Wilson County Libraries' Digital Navigator grant were to provide connectivity via hotspots and to bring on additional staff for the library. Frontier Wireless is the major provider in the area; many households find that service slow and unreliable. In the last few years, the library has lost funding from the County for librarian positions, and there are only two full-time staff positions serving three branches.

This program was able to successfully provide hotspots along with digital assistance to patrons who visited the library. Patrons were able to check out a hotspot for two weeks at a time, and all 12 hotspots were continually in circulation. Since the end of the grant, the number of hotspots has been reduced to 6 because of the cost of the monthly fee. The library also collected data on patrons' digital needs and feedback on Digital Navigator assistance by using sticky notes.

Digital Navigators

A major challenge was hiring a Digital Navigator Librarian. Adding staffing support was one of the main goals of the grant; however, hiring was difficult due to the one-year limit of the grant, the rural location, and the competitive labor climate at the time. They were able to hire a Digital Navigator Librarian, but that person left before the end of the grant period.

The Digital Navigator Model in Library Plans

The ten libraries that applied for and were awarded the Digital Navigator grant assembled plans that responded to the grant requirements, but the plans varied a great deal. As noted earlier, the core components of the Digital Navigator program included many funding options for dedicated Digital Navigator staff, the purchase of devices, and the purchase of services - including connectivity - to bridge the digital divide, and it was modeled after the Salt Lake City Digital Navigator program which included an expectation of deep collaboration with external partners.

Table 3 summarizes where each library focused their grant efforts. We note that while all libraries provide one-on-one assistance to patrons with ad hoc requests, two libraries took the Salt Lake City model to heart and dedicated staff to navigator services. The distinction is whether staff are focused on assisting people, or whether they are multi-tasking and responsible for many other things simultaneously as well. The intentional and formalized effort to provide individual digital assistance with a Digital Navigator is captured below. These project outlines were identified after systematically coding and reviewing interview transcripts and reviewing grant applications and quarterly reports. In some cases, the libraries altered their original plans.

Table 3 Primary Focus in the Library Programs

Digital Navigator Components	Total # Libraries Implementing each service	Libraries
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Digital Navigators

Digital Literacy	9	Brownsville Public Library, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Lubbock Public Library, Martindale Community Library, Lakehills Public Library, Pottsboro Public Library, Harris County Public Library, Dublin County Public Library
Classes	7	Brownsville Public Library, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Lubbock Public Library, Martindale Community Library, Lakehills Public Library, Pottsboro Public Library, Harris County
Individual Assistance - dedicated	1	Harris County Public Library
Individual Assistance - Appointment	5	Pottsboro Public Library, Dublin County Public Library, Lakehills Public Library, Wilson County Public Libraries,
Devices	9	Dublin County Public Library, Lakehills Public Library, Pottsboro Public Library, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Harris County Public Library, Martindale Community Library, Wilson County Public Libraries, Brownsville Public Library, Lubbock Public Library
Give Away	6	Dublin County Public Library, Lakehills Public Library, Pottsboro Public Library, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Harris County Public Library, Martindale Community Library
Loan	3	Wilson County Public Libraries, Brownsville Public Library, Pottsboro Public Library
In-Library Use	2	Lubbock Public Library, Pottsboro Public Library
Home Connectivity	5	Wilson County Public Libraries, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Pottsboro Public Library, Martindale Community Library, Austin Public Library
Hotspot Lending	5	Wilson County Public Libraries, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Pottsboro Public Library, Martindale Community Library, Austin Public Library
Affordable Connectivity Program	0	(Lakehills distributed information on the federal Affordable Connectivity Program.)
Partnerships	4	Pottsboro Public Library, Dublin Public Library, Harris County Public Library, Austin Public Library

Digital Navigators

Needs Assessments (with varied depth)	10	Austin Public Library, Brownsville Public Library, Dr. Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Lubbock Public Library, Martindale Community Library, Lakehills Public Library, Pottsboro Public Library, Harris County Public Library, Dublin County Public Library, Wilson County Public Library
Marketing	9	Pottsboro (TV commercial); Lubbock, Martindale and Wilson County (traditional media); Mercedes (social media); Lakehills (outdoor signs & pamphlets); Austin (local documentary nonprofit and cable access manager); Brownsville (website, social media); Harris (website, social media, other)

Each major component was shaped in unique ways in each library. One distinctive difference between the ideal, comprehensive model and how implementation actually unfolded was that these libraries typically adopted a subset of the model's elements rather than doing everything simultaneously. Each core element of the model is taken up below.

(1) Digital Literacy. Creating and teaching classes, offered on a schedule, was the most widely adopted component of Digital Navigator programs, with nine of the sites adopting that practice. (In fact, many libraries had been offering digital training classes before they received grant money.) A more classically-defined dedicated Digital Navigator notion of having dedicated personnel exclusively devoted to patron needs was executed at Harris County libraries, while other libraries preferred the scheduling efficiency of making appointments when Digital Navigator personnel were available or holding classes with registration procedures.

Grant funds enabled libraries to either hire staff or adopt a regular or more robust schedule for teaching, but few of the staff engaged in training were exclusively Digital Navigators. Five of the sites developed options for individual assistance with digital skills, with four of them scheduling appointments and only one (Harris County) committing to reserving staff time for meeting patrons more spontaneously as they needed help. Maintaining someone who was solely dedicated to responding to ad hoc questions and needs was a challenge because smaller libraries generally have fewer staff, meaning that a handful of people typically execute many duties. One Harris County interviewee remarked that these dedicated navigators

Digital Navigators

had to be explicitly identified as attached to the digital navigator program and segregated from other tasks because even in a large library system there was an inclination to apply staff time to whatever needed attention within the library. By way of example, consider one transaction between a Navigator and a patron, as reported by the Navigator:

A patron needed help securing tax return transcripts for the year 2018, 2019, 2020. She did not have a cell phone, so I used the branch library phone number to get the code from the IRS to validate the account. After this, I helped secure a laptop with a camera and a headphone set with a mic from the branch staff. Then I set up the video call with the IRS as they needed to verify her SSN card info and her Government-issued ID info. After this was done, I was able to log in to the ID.me tax portal of the IRS and download the tax return transcripts for the year 2018, 2019, 2020. The patron could finally use this to secure her housing assistance. This interaction lasted 150 minutes (2.5 hours).¹¹

This extended interaction is exactly what digital navigation is designed to encompass.

Training challenges materialized and altered some libraries' plans. As one interviewee put it, "We had a Plan, it looked great... until we began to implement. We are monitoring, tweaking, sometimes torquing! Like many of you, we are literally building the plane as we fly it." For example, classes being offered on a schedule translated into continuity and predictability for staff and for scheduling; more spontaneous help services, a component of a Digital Navigator model, were more difficult in terms of allocating staff time. Libraries gravitated to offering digital literacy classes as well because several of them already had been offering classes. While several sites had anticipated offering individualized instruction, only one implemented a model of making staff available consistently for spontaneous patron needs. Another four libraries scheduled individual appointments with patrons to resolve questions. Austin Public Library never launched its digital navigator training program through this grant, but it did spend some of its money

¹¹ This is reported in the Q4 Report from Harris County.

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on supplies.¹² It later used other funds to contract for Digital Navigator services with a local nonprofit, Austin Free-Net.

Scheduled and predictable digital literacy classes were the most visible component of these programs. Students for those classes often included people already using the library, rather than people entirely new to the facilities. That approach spared the libraries the costs of outreach, and still insured that the program was reaching people who needed the services in any case. Two libraries in smaller communities, Lakehills and Pottsboro, actively recruited new participants from outside the existing library base via partnerships for classes or device giveaways. Two fortuitous partnerships for Pottsboro with a nursing home and nonprofit House of Eli created new opportunities for one-on-one instruction. Dublin's approach was the opposite, in part because of concerns that demand would outstrip resources. This smaller library focused on achieving a manageable workflow, and it limited publicity about the program, noting in their Q4 report "keeping this program simple and almost automated in a best practice." Even so, Dublin's class participants included two women from a nearby domestic violence shelter; their former partners had smashed their phones and computers, and they found the Digital Navigator training gave them the freedom to seek jobs, apply for appropriate assistance and get in touch with family.

(2) Devices. Most libraries addressed device needs either by giving out computers or tablet (often Chromebooks, in six libraries) or by loaning computers (three libraries). Some declined to publicize these device programs widely lest they disappoint a surge in demand. Brownsville and Lubbock purchased enough devices to take for training sessions at a branch library. As discussed later, providing equipment was difficult in part because procurement and accounting issues substantially delayed their arrival at the sites, which in turn made planning or scheduling difficult.

(3) Connectivity. Enhancing home connectivity was challenging, and the pandemic environment had made connectivity even more important. Some of the ten libraries already had received funds through the FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund to purchase Wi-Fi hotspots and in-library equipment including

¹² Austin Public Library returned some of its grant money.

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computers. Either providing or loaning hotspots was the most frequent connectivity initiative at sites under the Digital Navigator program, with five sites initiating these loans. One librarian commented that they had assembled “connectivity kits,” with a laptop, a mouse, and hotspot, so that people could simply pick up a kit. However, they learned that people “did not want the laptops and the mouse - they want the hotspot because when we live out in the country, it’s spotty, you may or may not get [a signal]” and they already had a device with which they were comfortable – usually a smartphone. Indeed, offering hotspots frequently resulted in waiting lists because demand is high. Their portability makes their use in rural regions, where there may be more driving and longer distances from place to place and fewer other places offering Wi-Fi, even more valuable. Although there was some administrative interest in how libraries might facilitate households signing up for the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) program, only one of these libraries mentioned their activity with it, and that was primarily informational.¹³ ACP was launched in late 2022, toward the end of the TSLAC grant period.

(4) Partnerships. Partnerships, a cornerstone of the Salt Lake program, also were expected in the TSLAC grant programs. While many libraries anticipated forging partnerships with other city or civil society and faith-based organizations, that process was more difficult than some anticipated. Some libraries lacked close ties to local organizations, and in at least one case an anticipated partner simply failed to collaborate. In one larger community, many businesses were generous with technology donations, but the net result was that the library had difficulties getting the equipment out to the library patrons because it was a chore to establish a process and to staff that process. At the time of our visit after the program closed, some of those donated computers still rested in a closet. That partnership was limited to the business providing technology, although other partnerships followed in later efforts.

Four sites appeared highly successful in building close relationships with other organizations that, in some cases, assisted in technology distribution programs and served as alternative sites for training by Digital Navigators. A fifth site had identified a new potential partnership toward the end of its grant, and

¹³ ACP provides a discount of up to \$30/month toward internet service plus a device discount.

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although it had not yielded more than goodwill at the time of our data-gathering, the library staff were excited about its promise. Two of the smaller sites created partnerships serendipitously simply by trying to reach out and liaise with other organizations. They lacked a targeted plan to create a relationship with them, but rather conveyed an awareness and openness to new possibilities. In the case of larger libraries like Austin and Harris County, with so many potential businesses and organizations in the community, partnerships would seem to be easier; however, with respect to this particular program, a key resource for Harris appeared to be places such as churches that supplied both trusted and familiar locations at which to reach people and the people (students for literacy classes) themselves. We note that faith-based organizations were frequent partners in this trial across several sites. One ongoing class in Harris County staffed by a Digital Navigator was the product of interacting with a local church.

(5) Assessment. All ten libraries did offer a needs assessment of their communities in their proposals; it was a requirement in the NOFO. However, the depth of the needs assessment varied. For example, two libraries used the [Edge Benchmark](#) tool to do a detailed breakdown of their libraries' capacity and community needs. Another highly urban library monitored internal computer and Wi-Fi use, and it later used that data to determine where among its many branches training resources should be located. Using in-house data was a significant development since that library had started by sending trainers to numerous branches without regard to a needs assessment or local conditions. One of the smaller communities developed some asset mapping and built on the results of an earlier program dedicated to cultivating more technology awareness among staff; their conclusion was that they had to change their approach because they were inadvertently creating barriers to using the internet. After scrutinizing the data, the libraries altered their training. Another larger library had a city resident survey from the local University plus two local listening sessions around which to design services. However, smaller libraries often reproduced census data for their region in order to characterize the outlines of the local digital divide.

The bigger question with a needs assessment concerns the extent to which it figures into the actual program. The Harris County system's scrutiny of Wi-Fi usage stands out since that data directly led to resource assignments. Also, the Edge benchmark tool appeared to be helpful in the much smaller library

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using it. Austin's surveys and data-gathering clearly identified target communities for locating resources. However, in other cases, when libraries decided to focus on offering classes, and especially when they opted to target people already using the library, the formal needs assessment process did not provide guidance.

Quantitatively, several of the libraries (Wilson, Lakehills, Dublin, Pottsboro) tracked the number of interactions or devices handed out during the program as a quantifiable measure of digital literacy endeavors and to recalibrate their ongoing programs.¹⁴ Another larger library was tracking interactions and used the data to alter the program targets: “[We did not start tracking] users for three to four months. And then we had enough data to make the decision that there was no point running all the way to Tomball,” one interviewee shared, to explain that early data showed that patron needs were nearby and there was no need to travel to distant branches. Lakehills and one other system had a physical “note” tracking system in which librarians simply completed a small note when they undertook digital literacy consultations: “Yeah, we want to kind of have an understanding of what's great, what are people asking for technology-wise from us. So this is a quick way for the librarian staff to be able to make note, stick it and then just give me the whole stack of tickets and then I can put them into a database. That kind of gives me an idea how many people are asking about this? How many people asking about that? Through that first thing I noticed was nobody knows how to use their phone.” This led to offering training on using phones to access the internet.

(6) Marketing and Outreach. Marketing, public relations, advertising and overall outreach efforts varied significantly across the ten libraries. One library actively avoided outreach, while others wanted to do more but were hampered by internal red tape. Still others were limited by organizational capacity. Efforts at funded outreach were largely focused on mainstream media, i.e., traditional local news sources that were print, radio or TV, websites which focused on efforts to post announcements, social media channels, outward signage, such as posters, and internal communications, such as newsletters. That said, it appeared that *effective* outreach relied on (1) announcing and teaching subject material that was meaningful to the targeted patrons (such as how to use a smartphone for certain functions) and (2) using interpersonal

¹⁴ However, the librarians were not able to follow up with these individuals to better understand the impact of training. Again, they lacked the internal capacity to undertake that task.

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communication, including a Digital Navigator approaching patrons directly with offers of assistance. The latter overcame peoples’ reticence to confess that they did not know how to accomplish certain tasks. Libraries had to change their strategies across the program duration, trying different techniques to connect to patrons.

We report in Table 4 that some sites had local news coverage of their programs (“post hoc”), not the result of strategic outreach but presumably helpful, nonetheless. Two smaller sites proactively used legacy media such as local radio and newspapers, and in one case (Pottsville) developed a TV commercial for the program. Pamphlets and signage were present for one of the smaller libraries (Lakehills). Most libraries had some social media presence, but only one (Mercedes) reported using it to promote the Digital Navigator offerings. Dublin used neither traditional media nor social media to announce their offerings. Most libraries used external communication methods – newsletters, posters, flyers and so forth – to share news of the program.

These results contrast with some of the anticipated marketing that the grantees’ plans had offered. Several anticipated reaching out to many local organizations or even to neighborhoods that were targeted as needing Digital Navigator services based on census data. However, roadblocks appeared, preventing the implementation of more strategic and robust marketing plans. These roadblocks included limited staff time, which catalyzed actual program shifts from recruiting in new, external communities to serving existing, internal constituencies. For example, one site anticipated visiting a targeted neighborhood and hanging announcements on doors as a way to alert the residents to the library programs. However, the team realized that would take quite a bit of effort and simultaneously that people who already were coming to the library could use the training - a much easier population to target.

Table 4 Marketing and Outreach

Library Name	Mainstream Media	Website	Social Media	External Communication (Outward Posters, Flyers, Screens)

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Austin	Yes (post hoc)	No	No	No
Brownsville	Yes (post hoc)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Harris County	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dublin	No	No	No	No
Lakehills	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lubbock	Yes (post hoc)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Martindale	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mercedes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pottsboro	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wilson County	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Details on specific media include the following.

Mainstream Media

Mainstream media refers to traditional news (print and broadcast) sources based locally. Many of the libraries connected with local reporters to promote the digital navigators program. For some of the libraries, they had existing relationships with reporters and the story of receiving the grant was newsworthy enough to share with the wider community; as reporting rather than a strategy, this is labelled as ‘post-hoc’ media. The news stories themselves focused on the grant, what the library would do with it and additional quotes and information about the library and the digital navigators program.

No library relied exclusively on the mainstream media to promote its digital literacy programs. The libraries that did connect with reporters and news organizations, as noted above, already had relationships with reporters. Promoting the digital navigators program through the mainstream media was one part of their strategy, but some of that coverage evolved organically.

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Some libraries intentionally avoided publicizing the digital navigators program through the local media. One library noted that it would create demand that they would not be able to fulfill. Another library identified lack of capacity to connect with the local media as a major hindrance. As one librarian noted, “This is . . . our article in the *Chronicle*, so we got a little publicity. We had zero marketing, publicity, press from internal communications and marketing. Zero. We didn't have one flyer.” When asked why, the librarian responded, “Vested interest. It's just the thing we have to do. We got a grant and she [the grant writer] is going to do it.”

Websites

Sharing information on the digital navigators' program through library websites was a common strategy. Nearly every single library promoted its digital navigators program through the website. Some of the libraries created separate landing pages that included specific information and ways for members of the community to take advantage of the digital navigators program. One rural library posted information about the cell phone classes for seniors. These classes would teach seniors how to download photos, save data and download apps on their phones.

While some libraries promoted the program through websites, others assiduously avoided it. Internal capacity and preventing staff from feeling overwhelmed were major factors.

Social media

Nearly every library also used social media. One librarian noted that, after receiving the grant, they sent content to an employee who used social media. That library promoted their program through Meta (Facebook), Instagram, X (Twitter). Several of the libraries had their own social media platforms and leveraged those to post content. Among several of the libraries, librarians noted that they saw marketing and social media as tools, but they expressed frustration at the lack of internal capacity to fully leverage these tools. For one library, librarians struggled to advertise and promote the digital navigators program. They promoted the program through existing partnerships. “Yeah, our capacity is limited and so we really do depend on partners to, to make things happen.” However, the irony of trying to reach people who do not have digital connectivity or skills via social media was not lost on the program planners. One said, ““Only

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major thing I would have done was market to communities in a way that I could reach those who don't have computers. That was the most frustrating part. If we had the opportunity to market things in traditional ways, like radio and newspaper and maybe some mailers ... but we were put in a position where our only real options were social media. It just didn't make sense. I am trying to reach people who don't use technology through technology."

Others found that using social media was difficult given current staff capacity, and created flyers. One librarian said that flyers were effective and affordable. One librarian said, "Whenever I do outreach, I always take affordable connectivity posters and really push it to people. We help people here at the library, sign up if they want to do it online, and they don't know how. And then we also give people paper applications if that's their preference. So that was sort of the only way that we can really help me that other than providing 24/7 Wi-Fi, which we already do."

Other libraries relied on existing accounts to promote the program. One librarian said, "So the different libraries they kind of have like in terms of social media, use Facebook, for example, they have their own pages. So we would just let them know when we were going to be there and he [the webmaster] put it on their pages."

External Communications & Internal Communications

External communications factored in heavily to promote the digital navigator program in the form of flyers, screens and outside posters. Libraries also used word of mouth to promote the digital navigator program as part of an overall strategy. One librarian from a small rural library shared "So we do have Facebook pages and so I try to promote things very heavily on there. We also now have our monthly newsletter made so I've been publicizing the upcoming digital navigator classes. But really, it's mostly word of mouth." A medium-sized library also endorsed word of mouth marketing: "So it was by word of mouth, and it really was also just because the staff pushed it. We'd see people kind of struggling or like I don't know how to do this. Can you help me? Yeah, we can help you right now. But hey, we have a course on this. Yeah.... And

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they're like, Okay, yeah. And then they would come. So you know that that's the staff really helped a lot with promotion. So that helped us a lot.”

As another example of the power of word of mouth, one library found that its digital navigator had little to do, and the library was trying to identify ways to reach more people; ultimately this library adopted the practice of having the Digital Navigator roam the library and asking people if they needed assistance” (Harris County). One librarian noted that it was challenging to figure out how to reach people who needed the service: “It was a real slow start for a long time. And it much of what happens around here is word of mouth. We don't have a newspaper. We did do door hangers for digital navigators, yard signs, like at the bank.” Finally, some libraries used internal communication modes, such as informing other librarians about the program and providing updates.

Avoiding Publicity

Some libraries were hampered by internal challenges to mounting publicity efforts. One large library noted an article in the local weekly that had been published covering the digital navigator program, but that was the only publicity that appeared; even that had not been sought. In other cases, lack of marketing and outreach was an intentional strategy. One rural library noted that the demand for hardware far exceeded available equipment, so it preferred to only collaborate with existing partners. That library avoided promoting the digital navigator because it would have been overwhelmed with requests. As one librarian noted, “Because there was no way I could fulfill the need. I would have been inundated with people, and there was no way I was going to try to advertise publicly that what we had is available. I would have been overwhelmed.”

One larger library system noted that they wanted to do marketing and outreach efforts, but delays related to securing the funds stood in the way. One librarian said that they had received funding for marketing and outreach but with only three months remaining in the grant, they could not spend it. The library had hoped to send out mailers and run a grassroots campaign, and also had wanted to partner with radio stations or newspapers to publicize the digital navigators program. That library said some of the grant

money that they returned had been dedicated to marketing and outreach efforts: “I was excited to receive the funding for it and was frustrated that I couldn’t use it.”

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The program snapshots provided above and the different ways each library approached mounting a Digital Navigator effort illustrate versatile efforts to adapt the model to local needs, available expertise, and a short timeframe. The basic goals of tackling so many fronts - connectivity, literacy, getting devices to people, and running a program that targets specific communities, develops partnerships, and raises awareness - are multiple; as noted above, no single library tried to do everything. Defining success therefore is difficult. Success appears in different places.

Conventional metrics such as “numbers of people served” only tell part of the story. Required Quarterly Reports requested such numbers from the grantees. By the 4th quarter, the numbers were meeting the libraries’ expectations and, in some cases, dramatically exceeding what they had predicted originally.¹⁵ One element of the ideal model (Salt Lake City’s model) does prescribe gathering data through pre- and post-surveys with people in digital literacy programs, another fairly conventional success measure. None of these libraries used that pre-post mechanism. However, the feedback people provided to the libraries was overwhelmingly positive about their experiences with Digital Navigators.

The ways libraries talked about success varied greatly and may have been tempered by the challenges of the grant and shifting expectations, especially as wrinkles in hiring and procurement developed. All ten libraries described their digital navigator program as a success, but they found it in different places, in ways that indicate value beyond the number of people with whom Digital Navigators conducted formal training. For example, one library defined success in their digital navigator program because they were able to procure hardware, even though much of their hardware was stored in a closet. Lack of buy-in from the staff hampered that grant and its overall effectiveness, but the efforts to establish

¹⁵ One library deviated from its intentions in that respect.

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preliminary relationships with donors and to work with two branch libraries on digital inclusion ideas (including telehealth) were rewarding, nonetheless. Another library defined success as holding classes that attracted few participants but led to community partnerships by the end of the grant's term. That library found that success was determined through classes in which students developed a sense of community and were able to interact with one another and become acquainted with the library – a resource about which they had been unaware. Another library did not reach a large population of students, but the librarian noted that students were able to develop basic skills in computing and use their mobiles more effectively. These libraries pointed to the positive impact the program had on their library patrons and explained that it addressed a real need in their community.

TSLAC did not prescribe a metric for success, given the newness of the digital navigator concept and program. The diversity of the library communities and the available resources each possessed need some consideration in thinking through outcomes. For example, three of the rural libraries had a single library location and one full time staff librarian (who also acted as the library director). Their more limited capacity and financial resources affected how they implemented the program, and how they defined the goals and successes of their program. Success for them could be arousing interest among patrons in literacy services, or simply the ability to offer a device to a patron for online connectivity to accomplish a task. In contrast, in larger library systems librarians could monitor needs by measuring in-library wireless use versus in-library wireline computer use; the difference between the two could represent device needs, since people using in-library connections typically did not bring or do not have their own devices. Being able to identify needs accurately is a type of success.

Given the diverse nature of the libraries and their communities, quantified measurements of success miss the less tangible, but still important, accomplishments of the Digital Navigator programs. Four themes emerged based on our interviews: 1) the community benefits for expanding digital literacy; 2) how libraries thought about new or existing patrons; 3) engagement with seniors; and 4) the ability to implement this new program and interact with its many moving parts from an administrative standpoint.

Benefits of expanding digital literacy

Each of the 10 libraries described the success of the program in terms of the benefits of expanding digital literacy within their community, and they measured this in both qualitative and quantitative ways. They saw qualitative benefits related to the feelings of independence, confidence, and ownership of technology among participants. One digital navigator described how participants wanted to feel confident with technology: “I think most of it is they wanted that confidence. They wanted to be able to open a computer and not be afraid that it's going to explode.” The benefits were assessed based on individual interactions with patrons through classes or one-on-one support. Describing interactions with participants of the program through their level of engagement and excitement, a trainer commented: “I think most of excitement I've heard is actually from the content itself. They're learning. You know, they're excited to learn and be able to do stuff without asking someone else for help.” Librarians noted that during the pandemic, several patrons came into the library to learn how to pay bills and sometimes seek federal or state assistance, but they needed additional support; satisfying seemingly mundane but extraordinarily significant goals for individuals was rewarding. In a large library with dedicated navigator staff, circulating among patrons worked well for addressing peoples’ insecurity or embarrassment at not knowing how to execute a task: “...for the most part, we will just go out and be on the floor like where you see the computers. We will be on the floor, just kind of circulating. Asking people or introducing ourselves, letting them know what we're there for anything needing assistance. So a lot of times, that was how we began working with a lot of people or meeting people at the printer” one trainer noted. In the same vein, another librarian from a different site said “I think a lot of it's just listening and really understanding what that patron wants, demystifying what they think it was because sometimes it's a fear of using the system.” Expanding trust and feelings of efficacy among patrons were significant outcomes.

Working with Seniors

Seniors constituted a major demographic group the libraries engaged during the Digital Navigator program. Research consistently identifies this group as needing greater digital literacy and one that

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frequently lacks internet connectivity. It also was powerfully affected by the pandemic and the social isolation that frequently accompanied it. “I would say 90 to 95% of the questions are coming, I noticed, from senior citizens,” said one trainer at a larger library, a sentiment echoed frequently at the sites. Librarians noted that older patrons often struggle with connectivity for a variety of economic reasons. Many cannot afford quality internet and rely on the library for their connectivity, and in response several libraries provided hot spots for older patrons who would check out the hotspots repeatedly. When they could not access hotspots, they relied on their phones or nothing at all.

Efforts to meet the needs of seniors included classes, individual tutorials and other types of outreach. One innovative rural library provided at-home consultations for seniors who struggled with connectivity, providing them with individual support to which they responded very positively. They also reached out specifically to local organizations working with seniors. Older adults at several libraries enjoyed being in class environments in part because of the social interaction. One Digital Navigator trainer at an urban library branch characterized the environment that the seniors created during the digital literacy classes as a “family.” Attendees used the class as an opportunity to connect with others: “We definitely had a lot of our expert adults, our over-60 crowds, showing up, and then they used it as an opportunity to do more community engagement between themselves... They're so much like a family helping each other....” A similar sense of community among seniors was created at a small rural library in central Texas: “...And one of the ladies actually said in the second class that it's a club, and it's called “smartphones forever.” And I'm like, ‘smartphones forever.’ We'll have a club meeting twice a month, 11 to 12 every Monday. And they wanted more. So I said, ‘Okay, I can give you once a week, from 11 to 12. Every Monday, that's all I can do.’”

Administrative Confidence

Another type of success cited by the interviewees, both at the libraries and within TSLAC administration, had to do with resource planning and working with diverse units such as Accounting and IT within their own organization or with the agency itself. Program managers learned how to gather data

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and craft a compelling argument for resource planning, enhanced their general confidence and the ability to advocate, and came to a more conscious recognition that “the library does way more than “just” books,” as one trainer put it. Six of the libraries discussed their feedback and data gathering process during the Digital Navigator program (Harris, Wilson, Dublin, Brownsville, Mercedes, Pottsboro). The data gathered gave them ideas for how to improve the program, with some of the libraries using it to advocate for continuation of the program. One large, urban library system used this data to target the branches that had the most need for digital literacy and identify additional technological challenges: “So that exposed an area of need for us that isn't really tied to the grant and that was...the way we set up our printing. And so I hated that. That was something that took up some of their time, because I really want them, and they did use their time for other things, but it also gave us an opportunity to go, wow! This is a real issue that I don't think we were aware of....” Some interviewees also noted how important it was to talk to IT staff and to generate internal support for their efforts at the county or system level.

Confidence and advocacy were other notions of success. A grant administrator from TSLA noted that as the program went on the libraries became more confident in how they spoke about digital challenges - “And they're like ‘we have this many disconnected. We have these many people that need to sign up for our program’ and I think that was part of the struggle - to give them a language that they could use to advocate.” “The library is just not books. And we know there's books here. We know that's the operation of library. I said, but it's beyond that. It's way past that. These libraries might be case management.”

Soft skills & social capital outcomes

An understanding of how to build library patronage and community trust were critical to pursuing and implementing the Digital Navigator grant. This deep understanding and trust were achieved through accumulated social capital by the librarians. Without this social capital, it is unlikely that the digital navigator programs would have had the same level of impact. Several of our interviewees emphasized the importance of a Digital Navigator being patient, understanding, and showing empathy for the patrons in order to help them navigate pilot their digital challenges. The

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interviewees considered these soft, social skills very important to the success of the program. One library director specifically called on the personalities of their digital navigators as a key strength of the program, explaining that two employees began to work together as Digital Navigators and found it exciting to create the program and work with the local population: “Like they’re creating it and they’re super patient. Super nice to people. So I think people have been really comfortable with them and have been wanting to come back. I think they were really part of the success for the program.”

Social capital was created by the Digital Navigators through their tenure as library employees and their familiarity with the community. Most of the participants of the digital navigator grant were long-term library employees, with over nine interviewees having worked at their institution for over five years. These librarians and library assistants know their communities deeply because of the time they have spent at the library. While visiting each library for these interviews, we saw firsthand the familiarity between the librarians and library patrons. For example, during a tour of a border library, the librarian greeted a handful of patrons by name and directed them to sections of the library that interested them. Similar interactions happened at several of the libraries we visited. The librarians are trusted by their patrons because of their familiarity with the community. This tenure results in a deep understanding of community needs. When asked why a library decided to pursue the digital navigator grant, the most cited reason was the librarian’s experience with patrons directly at the library. A library decided to pursue the digital navigator grant because the librarians saw how the digital divide affected their patrons every day. The interviewees mentioned that computer-related questions are one of the most common requests from patrons. A librarian from a small rural library stated that “I could already see that, especially with COVID...that people need to own devices...and they needed the access 24 hours a day, seven days a week.” Another librarian and Digital Navigator from an urban library system stated that “people come in all the time who have either, you know, never used a computer before. Don’t know how to set up an email, and they’re confused why they have to make another account.” In these communities, the library and the librarian are considered a trusted institution for digital assistance. Library patrons understand they can get assistance with their digital needs at the library because they know the librarian and the librarian knows them.

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Another helpful ingredient enabling Digital Navigator programs to establish social capital was by hiring individuals with the essential soft skills or with a background in teaching. Several interviewees mentioned that patrons asking for digital assistance usually felt vulnerable and were afraid of making a mistake with the technology (Mercedes, Pottsville, Lakehills, Brownsville). To build a patron's confidence and ultimately help solve their problem, the Navigator needed to empathize with the community and adjust their approach as needed. One person put it this way: "I get a lot of blue-collar people here. So I try to explain in cars and car terms and via house terms. Like I say for email write your email address like your home address. You can't say I want to change from 123 street... unless you physically move you can't change the address, the address is done. But if you want to change your password.... Like your keys to your house or your locks to your house, you can just go to Walmart and get your locks. You can always change your password, you can't change your address." One library director described her experience with hiring digital navigators who did not have the right soft skills - "Originally with [one person], we hired two other digital navigators... and the job was not a good fit for them. And one of the sayings I've heard at a conference is 'we need more like Mr. Rogers than Sheldon Cooper.' It's not about the technology, it's about the human connection. And so those who don't know that they lasted a few months, maybe, and then they dropped off."

The ability to connect with patrons and generate trust is especially important because of the potential handling of sensitive information required to assist with some digital requests. Many of the requests Digital Navigators received were related to applying for government benefits or healthcare. These are sensitive topics that could require handling private information such as family health history, income, or social security numbers. A digital navigator in a large urban library system described helping with rental assistance as one of the most common requests - "The biggest value that we provided was for citizens who came in who need rental assistance now. To get the assistance they need to know how to deal with the computer because everything has gone online. Nobody wants anybody carrying around in an office anymore... So that was the biggest value."

IMPLEMENTATION FACTORS

The previous section detailed the Digital Navigator plans and aspirations and examined how the libraries sought to address elements of the basic Digital Navigator model. Numerous internal and external factors influenced the execution of the proposals, a not uncommon occurrence in any undertaking. Some were factors entirely outside of anyone’s control, but others may offer some lessons for future Digital Navigator programs.

Table 5 groups the major issues that interviewees reported regarding how libraries implemented their programs. In many cases, the factors interact with each other: the pandemic affected staffing, for example. We examine the external factors and then take up some of the internal factors. External factors represent dynamics over which the institution and the granting agency had little control.

Table 5 Implementation Issues

Site	Internal Factors			External Factors		
	Staffing	Procurement	Administrative Processes	Pandemic	Hiring Climate	Grant Timeline
Martindale	X	X	X	X		X
Lakehills						X
Dublin	X	X		X		X
Mercedes	X			X		X
Brownsville	X					X
Pottsboro	X					X
Lubbock	X	X	X			X

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Harris	X	X				X
Wilson	X		X	X	X	X
Austin	X	X	X	X	X	X

External Factors

Extra-organizational factors are initiatives, processes, or objectives from outside of the library institution that influenced Digital Navigator grant implementation. These factors are not within the control of the library or library staff but affected the success of the grant and shaped the program. Following our interviews and analysis of the grant documentation, three themes related to extra-organization factors were identified. These are employment, the pandemic, and the grant timeline. While there were other extra-organizational challenges that the libraries faced throughout the implementation of the grant, these three themes were the most prominent and affected the programs.

Hiring Climate

Employment and hiring had a major impact on how each library structured their Digital Navigator program. Four libraries attempted to hire externally for Digital Navigators (Harris, Pottsville, Wilson, Austin), with two of the libraries successfully hiring external candidates (Harris, Pottsville). Both of these institutions were able to extend employment to select staff, however; only one institution was able to continue employment as a Digital Navigator (Pottsville), while another moved the employee to a different position; the continuing staff person at Harris County found employment within another department that had an ongoing budget for the position. One library successfully hired a Digital Navigator librarian but experienced turnover toward the tail end of the grant. The librarian explained the challenges with hiring for a grant funded position: “when you go into it, if the person you’re hiring, if they know that it’s going to end, what is their commitment to you? I can sit here and say, ‘Well, I can try to bring you on

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come the new fiscal year, but there's no guarantee.' You know, and that's hard." The last library to include external hiring as part of their program struggled to find qualified candidates and ultimately turned to volunteer partners for filling the role of Digital Navigator. The grant administrator described the difficulty of hiring:

"Oh gosh, we had maybe 15 some odd people, but the quality of people.... we stayed true to our promise to the community, that we're going to try to get people from their community. That was in my job application of preferences: you have to know these six [targeted] neighborhoods fairly well and be bilingual. And, have done this before. And, so I mean, if we're going to do it, right ... We don't have time to train you and bring you up to speed. No, you have to be a people person. You have to be familiar. You have to know what a digital navigator kind of is... You have to kind of know what a library is ... you have to kind of know that community."

Finding the right three people turned out to be impossible in that case.

Three of the libraries supplemented current staff salaries and partially reallocated staff time and resources to the role of Digital Navigator (Lubbock, Brownsville, Mercedes). All three of these programs used a class format to deliver digital literacy education and either had previously provided some form of computer education classes or were currently providing similar education in a classroom setting. Supplementing the current staff salary enabled these libraries to take advantage of a skillset their staff had and not strain resources by introducing a new approach or new personnel.

Another three of the libraries deliberately decided not to focus on hiring or supplementing staff through the Digital Navigator grant. All three of these libraries are small systems, with only one location each and are located in rural areas. These three libraries are similar in how they are staffed, with only one full-time librarian who is supported with part-time staff or volunteers. The full-time librarian also serves as the Library Director. Given their current limited staffing, they would have had to pursue external hiring in order to delegate the role of the Digital Navigator. Each of these libraries cited the same reason for not pursuing external hires: difficulty hiring due to location and the time limit of the grant. The rural location of each of these libraries made finding qualified candidates difficult. Additionally, they could not

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guarantee the position would continue after the one year grant ended. “I mean, in a small town, it can take a long time to find somebody that has the qualifications that you would want. Yeah, so I was like, I'm probably going to have to get this myself given the timeline,” one of these librarians volunteered.

The Pandemic

Underlying the challenges with hiring was the employment environment due to the pandemic and the overall timing of the grant, as noted earlier. In 2021 and 2022, the labor market was especially strong, with unemployment at 5.6% in 2021 and 3.9% in 2022. There were more jobs available than people looking for jobs, which made it difficult for companies and institutions to hire. For a role to become more compelling, service jobs and administrative positions began offering higher hourly wages and benefits such as healthcare and paid vacation. Libraries, with limited budget and resources, could not compete with jobs that were able to more flexibly adjust to market conditions. Additionally, the pandemic shifted much of the workforce to virtual remote. Jobs that require being in-person were not as sought after, making the Digital Navigator position extra-challenging to fill. Several interviewees described ways the pandemic exposed how big the digital divide problem was in their communities: “the pandemic hit and it was just like, ‘Whoa, this became way more of an important life thing’” and “I could already see that, especially with COVID. I could already see that people needed to own devices, and you need to have that ownership and they needed the access 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Because if you're in a low-income area, you're working two or three jobs, you're working a shift that's not compatible with library hours, and you need to be able to access your bank information, to do these different things that maybe we're not able to help you with and you need support that way.”

The pandemic drove these libraries to recognize the need for the Digital Navigator grant. However, while most libraries were already offering computer classes, the pandemic shifted routine questions and processes to the digital space. Computer classes, which are more proactive and long-term, no longer addressed the immediate and short-term needs of their patrons. One library staff person captured this shift:

They're interested in meeting their immediate needs. They're not interested in learning stuff for the long term. We just need this, we need this now. You know, we offer computer classes. But usually,

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like I said, if somebody's going to be ... nobody's going to make an appointment or something like you can tell them to come here in three days. Teach how to use Microsoft Word, they're not coming for that because they need to know it that day. You know, they needed to know how to use the Internet browser that day so they could apply for Social Security benefits or so they could, you know, try to get money from something...

and:

There were a lot of requests for that one-on-one, even if it was just to show someone how to navigate through an application online. For example, Health and Human Services, all of their services in their application are basically online. That's a lengthy application to get online and provide them all of your personal information. On top of not knowing how to sign up and create an account because all these different places want you to create an account. They want you to have an email from individuals that have never had an email address. So even just providing them with that bit of information. I think went a long way because I would spend like maybe an hour and a half [doing that].

Timeline

Finally, the one-year grant timeline also proved challenging, especially in conjunction with processes we discuss below such as procurement. Nearly every interviewee cited the grant timeline as a trial, whether directly calling it out or indirectly describing how it affected their understanding of success. While the grant was awarded in late 2021, the grantees were not given their contracts until some time into 2022. While this did give some libraries additional time to think through their Digital Navigator plan, it significantly delayed the purchase of devices and hiring. Due to the reimbursement purchasing process associated with spending the grant funds, the libraries were hesitant to spend the grant money until there was a formal contract. Such delays coupled with long procurement processes, compounded by the pandemic, meant that some libraries were not fully operating their Digital Navigator programs until Fall 2022. Extending the timeline or providing the ability to renew the grant for an additional year was the most common feedback provided during our interviews. As one interviewee

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commented, “I believe we found out [we had the grant] that fall the previous year, so 2021, I believe. But because that was the first time TSLAC had done it, it took them a while to kind of get everything in order. So we couldn't really start until like March or something like that. So that's what pushed back our timeline. Because I think we were gonna start in February or something like that.” Another interviewee offered “We weren't the only system having issues with procurement. Yeah, in a two-year span you would have had time to address those issues.” One librarian in a smaller system stated “The online grant training was completed March 1, and then March 31, grantees sent back and returned amended contracts. So it was all like really, because this whole time we're still trying to figure out ‘what is, what is the plan here?’”

Internal Factors

The internal factors interviewees repeatedly pointed to included procurement problems, staffing, and administrative procedures. Each introduced wrinkles into the grant timeline and libraries' abilities to implement their plans. Internal staffing difficulties were related to the points made in the earlier discussion of the pandemic environment and employment conditions more generally. On the flip side, staffing had some silver linings when the right people were already in place at the library.

Procurement

One of the main internal delays concerned procurement or the ability to acquire hardware. The procurement process involved negotiating through several systems that were complicated multi-step, contributing to delayed starts. Nearly every library experienced procurement delays. TSLAC's contract process deferred the libraries' potential purchases. Several of the libraries cited the need for a signed contract in hand before starting the procurement process because the reimbursement structure of the grants. Consequently, the reimbursement process also affected the turnaround time for providing devices. For example, one library initially anticipated a one-month turnaround from the initial meeting with a patron to providing a device. The turnaround time was closer to three to four months. Regarding delays with procurement, one librarian said, “...I know there has to be control over the money. I understand that. But we're out here doing the hard work, and [the purchasing person] was very short with a lot of his replies with

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emails and sort of accusatory of doing things. And, then in my mind, it was like, I'm not asking TSLAC for money anymore, because they're too difficult to deal with." Another small library director said, "It's that lag time for that contract, and I wish I had been more confident. But ... my budget is so limited that if the contract was pulled, then with the county they would have taken it from me." One librarian from a rural community commented, "The sentiment with [our] advisory board is 'I don't want to pay for somebody else's internet. Nobody pays for mine. Why should I pay for yours?' After that? So until the grant came around, and I said look, 'We can do this grant based just for a try.' And then once it took off, we were able to get the support for it. They still said they didn't want it coming directly out of my budget." Another librarian from a border library also commented on the delay: "But I mean, yes, that was a problem getting in touch with the providers like Dell or whoever was going to sell us the computers and working all that out, but I don't remember it being that big of a deal. But yeah... we did get started I think, you know, around April or so. So it was a few months into the year that we finally got the ball rolling on the classes and stuff like that. So it was it was a little bit of a wait getting started but that also was with TSLAC as well. They're trying to work stuff. And I know some libraries have started way late to the year yet their program."

Staffing

The competitive job market affected the applicant pool for the part-time, no-benefits pay of the yearlong grant. Nearly every recipient that hired Digital Navigators struggled to find appropriate candidates, and turnover became another hindrance. An administrator noted, "It was really difficult for a lot of the library...they were able to hire on half the capacity... But then that took a lot of time. It's just where the job market was." Four libraries did hire people externally to be Digital Navigators; one individual left the job early for another post, and some hires were not able to maintain jobs with the libraries when the grant ended. On the other hand, one external hire at a small library was able to continue with them after the grant ended using another grant funded by Google.

Some libraries simply did not add new employees and rather retrained or advanced people already working or volunteering at the library, or the library directors themselves became Navigators. In the case

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of both libraries in the Valley, people who already had been working in some capacity at those locations became Digital Navigators. One library director, in commenting on strengths of the program, said “Strengths to me...I’m going to say it was our two gentlemen [the trainers]. They really took ownership of the program and I feel like they really believed in it. And they’ve been happy and excited and working on their stuff on their own like I don’t, I don’t need to worry.” They had the advantage of knowing the library well, knowing the other staff, and already feeling committed to the institution. The budgeted staff positions were not filled in some libraries, and that funding was either repurposed or returned.

Administrative Procedures

The paperwork associated with any grant may be overwhelming for certain libraries. Even in a larger system, one staff person observed “Grants equal paperwork. Grants equal, ‘I’ve got to stop everything and do this thing.’ Right? So grants need to fit. In my eyes, this is a learning lesson learned.” She continued, “I’m an office of one. So I administered, managed and implemented, and I’m an office of one. For them [the library overall], this was something new. It was more outward facing, which this library was not at the point of being outward facing. So multiple partners, community, things of that sort, was not already in place.”

Staff turnover was compounded by external and internal procurement delays. One of the libraries decided to pair giving away devices with classes to ensure that community members would understand how to use the provided devices. Staff capacity and lack of resources delayed them. That library also struggled to find the funds to make the initial purchase and had to make sure reimbursements occurred in a timely fashion. For another library, the Digital Navigator grant was the first they received. Staff had to simultaneously learn to advocate to state officials, navigate city processes and adjust to patron needs through Digital Navigators.

Internal red tape frustrated librarians during the grant process, one librarian explained:

“A lot of it had to do with just internal red tape...the first order that we placed took, I want to say, maybe 4 or 5 months before we actually received that [order]. I didn't want to keep placing orders

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for things that weren't coming to us. In other words, I didn't, I didn't want to put all my eggs in that basket, and so I started trying to find other ways. So I mean the initial phone call that we had ended up being a phone call that another division had, that they weren't using actively. And yeah, it was ...crazy, and it really upset me because the money was there. Big organization. Our department is one tiny department.”

Other administrative considerations also played a role. One librarian volunteered:

That was something that overwhelmed my staff, too, with not having the experience of what it looks like to teach or support a whole classroom of adults and how that environment looks different from one-to-one. And so we kind of took a step back, and in the middle of the project to kind of just talk about that, and give space to digital navigators to kind of share how it that's been going through struggles with that and just remind them. We get it. There's no perfect digital navigator, and every situation, or even session, will look different from person to person. And so kind of just kind of helping reframe that mindset, helped them be like, okay, so it doesn't feel like it's a failure.

Implementing and managing the program was a balancing act between library staff capabilities and capacities and library size. Available staff time and expertise shaped how each library implemented its program. The impact of finite staff capabilities is most pronounced in delivering digital literacy education and undertaking community outreach. Compared to the Salt Lake City Digital Navigator Model, which emphasized targeting specific communities by need and one-on-one assistance and vigorous partnerships, many of the Texas library grantees in contrast focused on existing library patrons and assistance in classroom settings. This difference between Salt Lake City's Digital Navigator program and Texas libraries' Digital Navigator programs has much to do with staff capability and with starting something new, all within the constraints of a short timeframe.

As noted earlier, most grantees did not move forward with hiring additional staff as Digital Navigators because of the short grant timeline and the difficult hiring climate in 2021. To implement the grant, libraries needed to rely on current staff; people managing the Digital Navigator grant needed to tap into their existing skills and strengths. Classes also made the most of limited staff time by enabling a one-

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to-many format for digital literacy education. The need among library patrons for digital literacy education was greater than library staff capacity for one-on-one assistance, and classes could sidestep certain staffing churn problems.

The size of the library also heavily influenced how grantees implemented and scoped their Digital Navigator program. Large and medium sized libraries had more resources available but were bogged down by bureaucratic processes and conflicting priorities. Grants are implemented from the top-down at large libraries, and it can be difficult to generate the staff buy-in needed to successfully manage the grant. As one informant commented, "...conceptually it sounds great... ..but grants are best when they're sought by the staff themselves. Because then they understand how it naturally integrates to what they're already doing. For them [the bureaucracy], this was something new. It was more outward facing, which this library was not at the point of being outward facing. So multiple partners, community, things of that sort was not already in place. So it was a new structure."

Small libraries are acutely aware of their staff limitations and bandwidths as the library director may be the only full-time staff librarian on the payroll. These staff constraints make it difficult to even apply for grants. However, grantees at small libraries were able to prioritize their efforts and more nimbly address challenges as they came up. Small libraries were not as bound by bureaucratic processes and other types of red tape. As one smaller librarian put it, "I've said it before, we're like an amoeba that we're going different ways and if there's something that blocks us, we find a way to go around it."

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are a central element of the Digital Navigator model. The Salt Lake City example illustrates how helpful these can be for accessing targeted communities, obtaining new resources, and enlisting additional capacity for training. Another byproduct of partnerships is additional marketing generating by working with more people. The libraries in Texas' Digital Navigators program that succeeded with outreach to new library patrons successfully leveraged relationships with community organizations, many of them faith-based. However, there was no magic bullet in their approaches; each library found its

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own way and sometimes was surprised at the positive developments. As mentioned earlier, giving away devices sometimes created partnerships if the recipients were members or users of a specific organization such as a Senior Center. However, partnerships were more important for some libraries than others. For example, one smaller library decided not to try to establish new partnerships lest they outstrip their capacity.

The NOFO had requested details on intended partnerships. While each grantee had intended to work with local groups ranging from the school districts to Goodwill to local literacy organizations, establishing new partnerships was time consuming. For the most part, they did not materialize. In one case, partners operated as donors but not partners in the sense of working directly with the library. In Austin, the City's library had several corporate partners who were anxious to assist by giving equipment. One staff member there noted:

Yeah, we're doing a relationship deal. And I don't enter into any strategic partnerships until we have a relationship. I just don't. That's just my practice is like, 'Are you committed, how committed are you and how long?' Right? Because it's not about you. We don't need the money. We really don't.

You need us. We are in the fortunate position of being able to help nonprofits. Yeah, it's the reverse. Indeed, while the equipment was appreciated, it did not yield new patrons. Indeed, the equipment largesse nearly exceeded the library's ability to deploy devices. The other large library system in Harris County also faced some disappointments in terms of generating partnerships initially. An interviewee there stated:

...at the beginning we would directly email and call community centers, and places like that had little to no interest. I had the digital navigators reach out to assisted living centers, community centers, and I think there were others. I just don't remember off the top of my head, and just we never had any real interest. We would, you know, post flyers, hand outs... any time we could [get] word of mouth, that kind of thing, but we were pretty limited. Which really is still a frustration. A lot of it had to do with just internal red tape.

However, partnerships were forged later on as the Harris County Digital Navigators began to work with patrons. One of the instructors explained that he developed a relationship with members of a small local church as he assisted them, meeting with them at the church facility for computer instruction. The instructor

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commented on the advantage of having the students being a familiar, supportive place, and being able to take time with them, stating “where this program was very helpful was...with senior citizens...you know, one at a time...that learning takes time.”

In smaller libraries, things operated differently. The smaller libraries that forged new partnerships took the approach of reaching out to many possible collaborators. In Pottsville, for example, we heard a comment on internal capacity that was echoed at other small sites:

...our capacity is limited and so we really do depend on partners to, to make things happen, and when the TSLAC grant first started, it was crickets in here. Like [staff person] was twiddling his thumbs, like nobody was coming in. And so not knowing how to reach the people who needed the service, we really looked at these partners to tap into their client base and so... the Area Agency on Aging, you know, we knew that would be a group that would need our services. And so fast forward to... it was a real slow start for a long time. And it much of what happens around here is word of mouth. We don't have a newspaper. We did do door hangers for digital navigators, yard signs, like at the bank, etc. Mailers.. The traditional stuff works really well.

Giving out devices proved to be a good vehicle for jumpstarting partnerships. Pottsville gave laptops to certain organizations that kindled a solid relationship and grew into training and support opportunities. In addition to the Area Agency on Aging, it assisted a nonprofit working with foster children, and setting up new computers at their facility led to providing training afterwards. The same thing happened with Celebration Senior Living, where providing computers to seniors led to requests for more training afterwards. One librarian there noted that “[their Digital Navigator] helped Celebration Senior Living so much that then when we had our annual luncheon fundraiser, they bought a \$1,000 table and then there was much fighting over where he would sit.”

In another smaller, rural library, the program director shared how device giveaways led to ongoing instruction: “I'm working probably the most with, ‘Oh, ‘It's a New Day,’ the local Spanish church in Pipe Creek. They wanted to do ESL. I can't teach ESL, right. So I set them up with a couple of computers to do that. And then they have sent me probably 6 or 10 people that needed computers. Some of them spoke no

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English, some of them speak a little bit of English. All of them are taking the English language classes, and they need the computers either for work or to do the classes. So I've really been able to benefit that portion of our community through this program.”

One small library that lacked its own facility for training offered a class with a local Methodist Church Soup Kitchen group serving a predominantly Hispanic population in a nearby location. They did not have devices to give, but the training was helpful, and it blossomed into more regular classes there; the librarian commented “it widened our community from just here [in town]...this extended our community outreach, what the library can do made us look good! It made us look really, really good and brought our name up as one of the top community things to do...and I think that help with the publicity that it gave us has been phenomenal.”

Three libraries worked with partners to recruit new users: community partners represented new potential patrons/students for the navigator services and even training sites. If a library did not have partnership for this program, the task of outreach ultimately fell on the shoulders of library staff who frequently not have the additional capacity to perform robust outreach and marketing tasks. The libraries who did not leverage community partnerships for outreach generally chose to focus on further engaging their current library patrons who needed digital assistance and education. That said, the libraries that focused on their existing patrons would detail how many of their typical patrons consistently asked for help with email applying for jobs online and other computer or digitally related questions, i.e., the need for digital literacy existed.

TRAINING RESOURCES: LITERACY MINNESOTA & CREATING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Literacy Minnesota and Northstar

TSLAC sponsored a part-time consultant from Literacy Minnesota who was available to work individually with any of the libraries. That consultant also attended the monthly cohort meetings that TSLAC hosted virtually. The resources of Literacy Minnesota's program Northstar were available to the grantees for the

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year of the grant. [Northstar](#) includes curricular materials and assessment measures (basically tests) so that people can learn on their own using those sources; alternatively, an instructor can use them in a class setting. After the one-year mark, interested libraries could pay the cost of renewing the program if they desired.

Five grantees used the resources to some degree while others did not. Table 6 reproduces some of the reactions to that Northstar. Those who did use Northstar found it extremely useful. One of the smaller libraries commented that it would have been impossible to come up with curriculum material on her own, so she provided links to Northstar materials and let people who wanted that exposure explore at their own pace. Others found the materials helpful for their instructors and appreciated the availability of assessments. The most important benefit was that Northstar provided a critical starting point to digital literacy education at libraries that either did not have established digital literacy resources or did not have the additional capacity to engage digital literacy with their patrons. If a library needed resources for a traditional computer class, Northstar's content was a good fit. It provided computer basics, such as excel, typing, email, and tests for each skill. While some grant participants described less traditional modules in Northstar, such as social media and cybersecurity, these were seldom used to inform Digital Navigator content.

Three libraries relied heavily on its content for digital literacy classroom curriculum development. One Digital Navigator described how they used Literacy Minnesota's content in the following ways: "I think a lot of it is for the teachers. But like I said, there are practices on there like handouts and stuff... they provide a lot honestly, Literacy Minnesota. That really helped us get the program off the ground, saved a lot of time." Literacy Minnesota's Northstar saved this library time and resources in curriculum development for computer classes, which otherwise needed to be developed from scratch. Another small, rural library with limited human resources described how Literacy Minnesota allowed her to provide digital literacy education: "I don't have the physical capacity to teach 60 people what they need. That was a good resource to say, 'Hey, I'm going to email you a link. You have the ability to get to this and learn if you need.'" This librarian is the only full-time staff member at their institution and also serves as the Library Director. Without Literacy Minnesota's Northstar, they would not have felt comfortable with the requirements of the Digital Navigator grant: "for teaching in general, I left that with Literacy Minnesota.

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That was really a function for me to be able to feel comfortable with the whole Digital Navigator structure.”

Another staff person pointed out that some of the content was useful for certain constituencies, such as teenagers who wanted to show competence and compete with each other on tests; however, for the sorts of questions that seniors posed for example, such as how to share photos of grandkids, a complete module experience and structured curriculum was not as relevant and would try the patience of the patron.

Others either tried or explored the materials, but determined they were not as helpful to their constituencies as they might be, or they already had alternatives. Two libraries used bilingual materials, for example, and Northstar was unavailable in Spanish. The Northstar materials included classic, computer-related content, but does not address the common use-related questions that come up in the sense of helping people directly apply for government assistance or write a resume or scan a photo.¹⁶ Some commented that their learners wanted human interaction and did not want to simply look at a screen and take tests. The cost of using that resource after the free year also proved to be an impediment. Even one of the wealthier urban districts reported that their IT unit refused to pay for it, although the program coordinator advocated for it because the instructors used it.

Table 6 Northstar Reception among Grantees

LIBRARY
Martindale
“No, no, because we have the modules that are directly for Martindale, And they're bilingual.”
Lakehills
“I didn't feel the need to continue... with the Literacy Minnesota. I think they're wonderful. It's just that I don't have the money to continue to ask. It wasn't benefiting me in my community as much as it would maybe other communities. So I think what they're doing is wonderful. It just wasn't for us just not a good fit.”
“I tried. It didn't seem to really fly very well with us. I think I have a much harder time getting people interested in sitting down and doing a tutorial.”
“Anything long term, they have to really dedicate it to take that on. And there's not that many people willing to do that. I tried advertising it. I tried kind of pushing the idea that you get a sort of certificate that you can show when you go to a job interview and things and really, nobody took me up on it.

¹⁶ The most popular modules, for example, are Using Email; Internet Basics; Basic computer skills; Windows; Mac OS; MS Word and Excel and Powerpoint; Google docs; Social Media; Information Literacy; Career Search Skills; and Your Digital Footprint.

<p>And I was like, ‘Okay, this isn't really going anywhere.’ But, what I did learn from them was that there are connections out there that you can make to help people with literacy education. It's just not the way that I need it.”</p>
<p>Dublin</p> <p>“However, for teaching in general, I left that with Literacy Minnesota. That was really a function for me to be able to feel comfortable with the whole Digital Navigator structure. Because I don't have the physical capacity to teach 60 people what they need. That was a good resource to say, ‘Hey, I'm going to email you a link. You have the ability to get to this and learn if you need.’”</p> <p>“Literacy Minnesota was essential for a smaller library for me to be able to do that educational aspects and have it available even where I wasn't able to like say, hey, come to class, and we'll go through it all together. It was essential for the format of the Digital Navigator.”)</p>
<p>Mercedes</p> <p>“they provide a lot honestly, Literacy Minnesota. That really helped us get the program off the ground, saved a lot of time. Because they pretty much had the lessons created more or less. We just had to pick and choose what we wanted for our class and, you know, whatever fits in our time constraints.”</p>
<p>Brownsville</p> <p>“...the lessons are very, I think they're very well explained. They're small videos. It also gives the learner a chance to practice, like moving items to the correct space, because some people have problem with clicking or moving a mouse, or understanding how to highlight and stuff like that. So the lessons let them practice, so that they're ready for the test, and I think they're very good.”</p> <p>“Our staff loves the Northstar assessments, too, because if they don't understand something, they know they can go back to the lesson.”</p>
<p>Pottsboro</p> <p>“It's relevant, but... there wasn't a lot of meat in the modules. But yeah, if, you know, what's an operating system, right, what's word what's Excel, you know, they had the basic modules in there. So it was good for the kids. You know, when I was doing the digital navigator for the, you know, training the teens, I used a lot of Northstar curriculum, you know, and that was good I mean, it was a good starting point. And then we would go through and do the assessments together and they would kind of compete against each other and who was going to get the best score, but it that I mean, it was it was fine as a as a starting point.”</p>
<p>Lubbock – did not use</p> <p>“I kind of just went off of my own stuff. But I knew [Northstar] was there. I knew it was available and I did, you know, look at it when I had a question about something. But for the most part no, it was. It was mostly my stuff.”</p> <p>“In terms of actual curriculum, materials, the program included a person who was available to consult. She never came down to Texas. I don't know if she could have or not, but she never did. She was it was very part-time on their part that, you know, they were halftime, but that was mainly access to their curriculum materials.”</p>
<p>Harris</p>

“I would always use that as a resource. If I was working with someone who didn't know how to use Word who wanted to know how to use Excel ...in the beginning I know they were good and brought a lot of those beginner programs because the public, the computers that are here in this situation, that the libraries they use like Excel, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and teach you how to use those things.”

“I reached out to the division that oversees our databases, they were very resistant to the idea of incorporating something like [Northstar]. They wanted to know whether or not we had used them in the past? And if we had what did the cost look like? And I got none of that information in this long exchange. And they decided we don't need something like that which I don't agree with. And so that was frustrating to run into that kind of obstacle. Because I do think it's a good resource, and the digital navigators used it.”

Wilson

“... I can tell you my experience between November or December and April. It wasn't any help to us, because at that time, our people aren't interested in sitting down and reading the screen. They want interaction. And the few times that I did it by myself, though I don't remember which lesson I picked. It was just reading screen, screen, screen, screen....”

“she [one client] said she sat down and did one, and it was - and she's a retired teacher - she said, ‘it was read this, do this task, read this, do this task. Now take a test.’ And she's like, ‘Well, I would much rather have that human contact helping me than I would anything else.’”

Austin

“We signed on to have their curriculum, Northstar. We got that for free. We decided that's not what the people... ...that people didn't enjoy it.”

Cohort Meetings: Creating a Community of Practice

Four of the libraries found the monthly cohort meetings led by TSLAC staff to be helpful. These librarians emphasized the benefits of collaboration, learning from each other and providing support throughout the grant process. One librarian at a small, rural library described the benefits of the monthly meetings as an opportunity to collaborate and learn from other libraries: “I am a huge believer in the power of collaboration. The digital navigator program was a very good collaboration because we had different size libraries, all kind of learning about a new goal. Everyone had kind of different approaches to it. And so some of those approaches, I was able to adapt like the notes. So that was, in fact, it was really sad when we had our last digital intergroup meeting. It was so worth it. Getting together and discussing and learning together. It was wonderful.” The collaborative benefits were reiterated from an administrator at a medium urban library:

Digital Navigators

“One of the greater benefits I saw in us having the coalition that we did was I got to hear all the great ideas everybody else was having and all the issues they were having to be like, ‘Okay, I can move it this way and it might work.’ But any little small step is still a great step for patronage.” Another appreciated the support: “I know the first couple months of the meetings in the classes I was like absolutely felt like the only person who didn't know what they were doing. And, so I think finally one day during a class I asked, ‘so is anybody else as lost as I am because I am completely ... I have no idea what I'm doing.’ And everyone else like, “Yes.” And I was like, Thank God, I'm not the only one.”

Some of the small, rural libraries saw the monthly meetings as an opportunity to tap into human resources not available to them at home. The monthly meetings were a space to bring questions and hear words of support from others in a similar position. “Yes, they were helpful. In navigating the different, smaller, I would say, issues and also encouragement. Like, hey, I'm having a problem with the ECF. And I don't know why that was one of the things that I did have a problem with. I'm like, I don't know why this keeps doing this. ‘Just keep trying’.”

Most of the critical feedback about the monthly cohort meetings was related to the time commitment, challenges of scheduling, and relevancy of the content. Almost all Digital Navigator grant awardees balanced additional full-time roles and responsibilities, which made preparing for and attending an additional meeting each month difficult to balance. One Digital Navigator and librarian in a large, rural library described the challenge of balancing multiple roles: “I only went to a couple of the meetings just because they usually happened, I mean while I was, you know, at the service desk.” Another librarian at a small, rural library described the difficulty navigating their schedule: “Well, the thing is too, is that whenever the cohort meeting's scheduled, I was always commuting. I was dropping off my kiddos with my mother-in-law and like heading over here and I'm way too nervous to be on zoom in the car.” Several of the libraries also did not find the topics and content of the meetings relevant to their Digital Navigator program. One librarian at a small, rural library provided this feedback: “the feedback I would have is I didn't find our group meetings helpful because we were all working on such individual projects.... that I

Digital Navigators

didn't feel like I was learning from them and I bet they weren't learning from me because we're all doing something very different.”

CONCLUSIONS

Findings from the yearlong Digital Navigator grant indicate that most of the libraries had positive experiences with their programs. The efforts contributed to their communities in meaningful ways: they contributed to digital literacy among people who needed it; they expanded libraries' ties with local organizations as well as with their local residents. They built confidence among their students and themselves. The library staff became more adept at running their programs and being able to explain their efforts more broadly. They succeeded in cultivating appropriate staff in most cases, and sometimes greatly exceeded what they thought might be possible. New digital literacy resources were explored and used, with some sites developing their own materials for training.

Not all the elements of the Digital Navigator model were deployed by every library. This mix of sites, large and small, urban and rural, embodied different needs and different capacities. Some sites struggled with initiating their programs, securing support and reimbursements for equipment; many also scrambled to identify the right talent to serve as Digital Navigators willing to work a limited term position with no benefits; hiring during a pandemic compounded staffing problems. The early months of the grant frustrated some because procurement was slower than anticipated. Some programs were able to obtain necessary equipment while others made their hires or deploy new equipment much later than they had hoped. Delays created frustrations that in some cases may have led to deprioritizing the digital navigator grant, especially if staff turnover also occurred. Other internal delays concerned institutional buy-in and support from existing staff.

Toward the end of the grant, several libraries found the endeavor sufficiently useful to continue in various ways. For example, Austin contracted with a local nonprofit to deliver Digital Navigator services at targeted libraries and community centers; Pottsboro found another grant to support an outstanding Digital Navigator who had endeared himself to the community; Martindale had discovered a side of their

Digital Navigators

community they had not known much about, and they ignited new interest in the library among that group; Mercedes, Brownsville and Harris County were convinced of the usefulness of digital literacy classes and they continued them.

Success for several libraries included holding classes, training older patrons and securing hardware for patrons who needed connectivity or computing devices. For some, success meant establishing partnerships that they hoped would continue. One year after the libraries received the grant, the gains made are clear, but the grant itself presented barriers to providing support for many of those who most needed it. If the digital divide is to be bridged, more support and fewer barriers are required. Libraries will be a critical contributor to the solution.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Protocol: TSLAC Digital Navigators

Semi-Structured Interviews for Program personnel at ten TX libraries + brief background form

These are to be the sources for interviews with program personnel at the ten library sites identified by TSLAC.

A. Background (self report on a cover sheet)

1. Gender
2. Age category
3. Years at this institution
4. Role with Digital Navigators project
5. Major responsibilities

B. Identifying Partners

- a. Who are your current major partners for digital services and training in the community? Are there others who should be involved, or who you tried to involve?

C. Community Interactions

- a. How did you identify what your goals would be for enhancing digital skills/literacy in your community?
- b. Who are your routine community partners? Did any 'rise to the top' during this program? Did any of them drop out or lose interest?
- c. How do you interact with the community beyond making library services generally available? Prompts: communication tools such as newspaper ads, radio stories, other articles, social media, attending community meetings, using an Advisory Board, etc.

D. Internal processes: goals, norms, constraints

- a. How did you and your library decide to undertake the grant proposal?
- b. When you received the grant, how did you modify its goals or vision?
- c. Were there alternative (competing) ideas about how to accomplish your community's objectives?

E. Implementation of the DN program

- a. Can you describe the steps you took to create and launch your DN program?
- b. What were the problems that you encountered? Do you believe you resolved them? How?
- c. How did you interact with Literacy Minnesota?
 - i. Problems?
 - ii. Major advantages and successes?
- d. To what extent did you receive the assistance you needed for success?
- e. What would you change about the program, looking back?
- f. How do you assess your program's strengths and weaknesses?

Appendix B Digital Navigator Project Summaries

Austin Public Library

Austin Public Library (APL) was awarded \$237,381 from the Digital Navigator grant. Most of this funding went toward providing Digital Navigator staff salaries. APL struggled to implement the Digital Navigator grant because of the grant's short timeline and lack of internal buy-in from library staff. The Digital Navigator grant administrator described the program as laying the foundation for Austin Library branches to build upon in the future as needs arise. Their core program elements include marketing materials, general program assets, and introducing local library branches to central partners that they may not have had relationships with before. The administrator stated this year was about developing models and frameworks that other branches could utilize in the future.

The Little Walnut and Southeast branches were the most involved with the Digital Navigator and Telehealth grants and have sustained versions of the Digital Navigator program. Surprisingly, APL returned most of the money from the grant to TSLAC because community partners were able to donate devices and because it faced hiring difficulties. APL intended to use most of the grant to hire Digital Navigators. The system posted 7-8 Digital Navigator positions at 20 hours a week but faced a competitive hiring environment and internal processing delays. Finding qualified candidates was difficult. APL interviewed a total of 15 candidates and hired three. Digital Navigator candidates were required to be familiar with the neighborhoods they would serve, be bilingual, and have some experience in remote instruction or teaching. Out of the three, one candidate has remained as APL's permanent Digital Navigator beyond the term of the grant. After the grant ended, APL partnered with Austin Free-Net, a local nonprofit dedicated to digital equity and inclusion, to provide digital navigation services for the library system.

Brownsville Public Library

Brownsville Public Library was awarded \$80,000 from the Digital Navigator grant. Funding was allocated toward the purchase of devices for use at the library and for check-out, and for the extension of Northstar services beyond the one year. No funding was allocated for staff. Brownsville successfully used the Northstar materials and conducted classes as the core elements of their Digital Navigator program. The Brownsville Digital Navigator team included a grant manager and two library staff who took on the role of Digital Navigators part-time. Brownsville hosted classes at two library branches at different times. Classes were drop-in, with any patron able to join whether or not they had attended the previous classes. The classes focused on a variety of topics including Microsoft Word, email, and smartphones. Brownsville Public Library has sustained their program and continues to provide Digital Navigator classes. They have also continued their engagement with Literacy Minnesota's Northstar software for an additional year.

Digital Navigators

The main challenges with implementing the grant included city processes and adjusting to patron needs as the program unfolded. This was the first grant the grant's administrator sought out and obtained. Throughout the process, she learned how to advocate to city officials.

Dublin Public Library

Dublin Public Library was awarded \$69,302 in grant funding. Over \$50,000 of this was used to purchase devices for community members. The remaining funds were used to supplement the grant administrator's efforts and marketing efforts. Dublin's Digital Navigator program focused on providing devices to community members identified through key partners. Dublin's Digital Navigator grant manager leveraged established relationships with community partners and was able to reach individuals most in need, such as single parents and others. The grant's administrator used these partners as a funnel to spread the word and vet potential participants of the program.

Dublin's program successfully provided devices to over 50 members of the community. This program also served a wide range of ages and use cases, with patrons needing devices for work, school, and general connectivity. To ensure the program reached the neediest population in Dublin, the library did not proactively advertise the Digital Navigator program but relied on word of mouth from partners and patrons.

Challenges include the reimbursement procurement process and the one-year time limit. Due to the one-year timeline, Dublin's library did not consider hiring additional staff as Digital Navigators. This had implications on how the program was structured because everything had to be achievable within one person's capacity. The reimbursement process also affected the turnaround time for providing devices. The grant administrator initially anticipated a one-month turnaround from the initial meeting with a patron to providing a device. The turnaround time was closer to three to four months.

Harris County Public Library

Harris County Public Library was awarded \$295,643 in grant funding, and over \$240,000 of these funds were used on staff salaries for hiring Digital Navigators. Harris County Public Library differed from most of the other grant recipients because of the large size of their library system and the diverse patron population. Harris hired Digital Navigators whose sole purpose was to provide digital assistance and guidance through one-on-one support. Originally, the Digital Navigators traveled to different locations but ended up spending most of their time at the Aldine and Barbara Bush locations. The Digital Navigators chose these locations based on library system data on computer and Wi-Fi usage.

Harris County Public Library system engaged regularly with one community partner in this endeavor, a church where they hosted digital literacy classes weekly. However, most patron engagement in the program was one-on-one, with individuals coming up and asking for help while they were at the library or setting up individual appointments with a digital navigator. The most

Digital Navigators

common help requests were accessing email, applying for jobs, and navigating government benefits websites.

The main challenges were hiring Digital Navigators, the short timing of the grant, and the additional internal processes of serving a large branch system. Two of the digital navigators remain as Harris County Library employees in different capacities. Digital Navigators were temporary positions lasting the length of the grant.

Lakehills Public Library

Lakehills Public Library was awarded \$68,584 in Digital Navigator grant funding. Over \$56,000 of these funds were used to purchase devices for community members. The Lakehills Public Library focused on giving laptops away to patrons who needed them, hosting weekly digital literacy classes, and establishing local community partners. The Digital Navigator grant became a catalyst for the library to connect with other community organizations. In order to ensure the laptops and connectivity devices were given to community members most in need, the Digital Navigator grant manager utilized partnerships to recruit individuals. Many of these partnerships were not established before the Digital Navigator grant was awarded. The creation of these partnerships is a successful outcome with continual impact. The Lakehills Library now meets regularly with these partners and is able to reach beyond the walls of the library to engage different community groups.

The weekly digital literacy classes did not have a formalized curriculum but based content on the concerns and questions of the attendees. The classes, held weekly on Mondays, typically consist of about 15 people, primarily over 60. Attendees formed a mini-community, with many of the same individuals showing up weekly and helping each other. Most of the classes focused on smartphone digital literacy.

Challenges with implementing and administrating the Digital Navigator grant included the short grant timeline and identifying the best way to provide digital literacy education.

Lubbock Public Library

Lubbock faced significant administrative challenges with launching their Digital Navigator program because the longstanding library director left at the beginning of the program. This director had the original vision for the grant and was responsible for drafting the goals and scope. A branch librarian taught the computer classes throughout the year but was not involved in crafting the grant goals and program. While the staff turnover was a challenge, Lubbock was still able to successfully purchase devices and provide computer classes at all four branches. One of the major successes of the program was Lubbock maxed out registration for the computer certificate classes and provided classes to over 80 people. Most of these individuals were not already patrons of the library and heard about the classes through local newspapers or television stations.

Digital Navigators

Lubbock used most of their \$79k allotted funds to purchase laptop devices for use in their libraries and reimburse librarian class time. In the initial proposal, there was an intention to launch a hotspot program, but that did not get implemented. A key reason for this is due to the staff turnover and the external and internal procurement delays. The major challenges for this program were the shorter timing of the grant prevented hiring additional staff. This put a strain on the single staff librarian involved because they hosted classes at all four locations. Uncertainty regarding what was expected of the grant was also a challenge as it further delayed the implementation and procurement of devices.

Martindale Community Library

Martindale is one of the smallest communities with a population of just over 1,700. The library is independent and sustained through a variety of grants. The 70k Digital Navigator grant was one of the largest sums of funding they have received. The grant was primarily used to pay library staff, purchase devices, and provide digital education to Martindale community members. The digital divide in Martindale is felt disparately by the Hispanic community. Many residents rely on the library for reliable Wi-Fi and general digital access.

Two of the main challenges were procurement timelines and drafting the goals of the Digital Navigator grant. While the library provides public Wi-Fi and Wi-Fi extenders, shifting from providing connectivity to providing devices was a significant change in the role of the library. Martindale's Digital Navigators recognized that many members of their community do not have access to a smart device, whether a phone or a computer. They decided to pair giving away devices with classes to ensure that community members would understand how to use the devices once provided. Developing the education was challenging because of the lack of staff and resources at Martindale. Procurement was also a challenge, primarily due to the reimbursement model. Martindale struggled to find the funds to make the initial purchase and had to make sure they would be reimbursed in a timely fashion.

Hector P. Garcia Memorial Library, Mercedes

Hector P. Garcia effectively used the Northstar materials provided by Literacy Minnesota, successfully hired and retained Digital Navigator staff, and hosted regularly scheduled digital literacy classes. Hector P. Garcia received \$69,950 in grant funding and distributed it primarily to Digital Navigator staff salaries and the purchase of 52 Chromebooks. Structured computer literacy classes based on Northstar were the foundation of their Digital Navigator program.

The Digital Navigators transformed the Northstar material into classroom-style content and added supplemental Spanish-speaking materials. Patrons were required to sign up before the courses began. At the end of the course, patrons were given a Chromebook to mark their graduation from the Digital Navigator program. The device acted as an incentive to complete the program. At the end of the grant, this library provided 48 devices. Hector P. Garcia has retained both Digital Navigators who continue to provide digital literacy classes several times a week in English and Spanish.

Digital Navigators

Initially, library staff planned to spread the word about the Digital Navigator program by door-knocking and other promotional campaigns. However, they did not end up pursuing this strategy because the classes filled up quickly with current library patrons. The grant administrators expressed excitement over the popularity of the class but recognized they were not serving the entire community affected by the digital divide.

Pottsboro Library

This \$66K project aimed to provide one-on-one digital navigator services to Pottsboro community members. Most of the budget supported personnel costs, alongside some laptop purchases (10 machines) and four desktop computers, as well as the monthly costs of ten hotspots. In this small community of about 2600 people, the Digital Navigator program estimates that about 400 people were served, particularly through classes at various senior centers, community events in collaboration with partners, and one-on-one appointments with part-time Digital Navigators. The Digital Navigators who were hired worked with approximately 150 people through one-on-one appointments. One Digital Navigator has remained in his position with the Pottsboro Library and has appeared in marketing and ad campaigns promoting the program. Feedback from patrons has been very positive.

Wilson County Libraries

Wilson County Libraries were awarded \$109,921 through the Digital Navigator Grant, with the bulk of that funding allocated to supplementing staff salaries and hiring an additional librarian. The primary goals of Wilson County Libraries' Digital Navigator grant were to provide connectivity via hotspots and to bring on additional staff for the library. Frontier Wireless is the major provider in the area; many households find that service slow and unreliable. In the last few years, the library has lost funding from the County for librarian positions, and there are only two full-time staff positions serving three branches.

This program was able to successfully provide hotspots along with digital assistance to patrons who visited the library. Patrons were able to check out a hotspot for two weeks at a time, and all 12 hotspots were continually in circulation. Since the end of the grant, the number of hotspots has been reduced to 6 because of the cost of the monthly fee. The library also collected data on patrons' digital needs and feedback on Digital Navigator assistance by using sticky notes.

A major challenge was hiring a Digital Navigator Librarian. Adding staffing support was one of the main goals of the grant; however, hiring was difficult due to the one-year limit of the grant, the rural location, and the competitive labor climate at the time. They were able to hire a Digital Navigator Librarian, but that person left before the end of the grant period.

Appendix C: Coding Categories

Question Category	Question	Code
Background	Gender (M, F, prefer not to say)	Gender
	Age (in ranges)	Age
	Years worked at this institution	Years worked at institution
	Role with Digital Navigators project	DN Role
	Major responsibilities (brief description)	Major Responsibilities 1=Director or lead – running the program 2=trainer 3=other
Identifying Partners	Who are your current major partners for digital services and training in the community?	Partners Later coding: divide into types – other gov units, businesses, nonprofits; other
Community Interactions	How did you identify what your goals would be for enhancing digital skills/literacy in your community?	DN Goal Identification Types: 1 = formal (as with EDGE or a local survey); 2= basic Census data; 3= other

	Who are your routine community partners? Did any 'rise to the top' during this program?	Ongoing Partners; Partner Engagement Define: routine=prior relationships;
	Did any of them drop out or lose interest?	
	How do you interact with the community beyond making library services generally available? Prompts: communication tools such as newspaper ads, radio stories, other articles, social media,	Marketing 1=Legacy media 2=Social media 3= Other
	How do you interact with the community beyond making library services generally available? attending community meetings, using an Advisory Board, etc.	Outreach Define: 1 = attend local meetings; 2= maintain Advisory Board; 3= other
Internal process: goals, norms, constraints	How did you and your library decide to undertake the grant proposal?	Why DN Grant – Reasons Cited
	When you received the grant, how did you modify its goals or vision?	Program Goal Change; Program Scope Change
	Were there alternative (competing) ideas about how to	NA – code text referring to this

Digital Navigators

	accomplish your community's objectives?	
Implementation of the DN Program	Can you describe the steps you took to create and launch your DN program?	How DN Launch: code text referencing writing the proposal
	What were the problems that you encountered?	Problems encountered; Procurement – local Procurement – TSLAC Timeline Other
	Do you believe you resolved them? How?	Process of resolving issues Internal to library External to library Other
	How did you interact with Literacy Minnesota?	Separate meeting with LM Mentioned cohort meetings Other Interactions with LM
	Problems with LM?	Problems LM Duplicating services Other
	Major advantages and successes with LM?	Pluses LM
	To what extent did you receive the assistance you needed for success?	Types of Program Support
	What would you change about the program, looking back?	Program Feedback

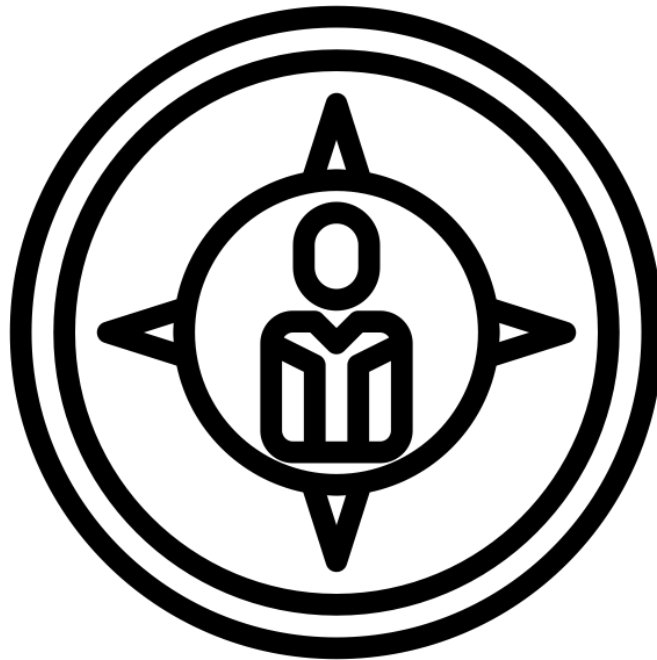
Digital Navigators

		<p>Extend timeline</p> <p>Problems with hiring</p> <p>Other</p>
	<p>How do you assess your program's strengths ?</p>	<p>Strengths</p>
	<p>Weaknesses?</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p>
<p>Outcomes</p>	<p>Program outcomes</p>	<p>Open code - including new patrons, increases in classes, individual digital literacy gains, etc.</p>

Appendix D: TSLAC Notice of Funding Opportunity



Notice of Funding Opportunity



Texas Digital Navigator Grant
Program Guidelines

Application Due Date:
Friday, October 1, 2021

Library Development & Networking Division August 2021

Comments regarding the programs and services of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission can be addressed to:

Director and Librarian

P. O. Box 12927 ♦ Austin, Texas 78711-2927 512-463-5460 ♦ 512-463-5436 fax

A. Program Description

Responding to the emergent community needs identified by Texas libraries in the areas of digital inclusion and access to resources and services, the **Texas Digital Navigators grant program** funds libraries **to develop and implement a unique Digital Navigator program with the help of a trusted community partner to close the digital divide in their area in a measurable way**. Selected libraries will be provided with full funding for navigators and devices, provided digital equity training from national experts, receive support from a community of practice, and be assisted with collecting and communicating the results of their project to other library staff, stakeholders, and funders.

Digital Navigators are individuals who address the whole digital inclusion process — home connectivity, devices, and digital skills — with community members through repeated interactions. A trained Digital Navigator will be able to assess a community member's need, and competently guide them towards resources that are suitable both for their skill level and lifestyle. Digital Navigators are familiar with resources that relate to digital equity such as Internet services providers and devices, and they help residents learn to use critical online services that provide guidance with food support, rent, education, employment, childcare, government benefits and more. They recommend resources and check back with the client.

Additionally, this project seeks to build the "**Connectivity Literacy**" of Texas public library staff by developing their critical understanding of the Texas internet connectivity landscape through community engagement, data-driven decision making, and a deeper understanding of approaches, providers, devices and educational resources available to assist with digital inclusion.

The Texas Digital Navigators grant program is designed to help communities respond directly and immediately to the pandemic as well as to related economic and community needs through equitable approaches. Spending priorities are as follows:

- a) Enabling Texas libraries to reach residents through digital inclusion efforts, particularly in support of education, health, and workforce development needs.
- b) Equipping Texas libraries to safely respond to the pandemic by implementing public health protocols.
- c) Supporting Texas library services that meet the needs of communities, including costs such as personnel, technology, training, materials, supplies, equipment, and associated indirect costs.

Programs should meet the following LSTA goals as identified in the 2018-2022 LSTA 5-Year Plan ([https://www.tsl.texas.gov/sites/default/files/public/tslac/ld/pubs/lstaplan/LSTA 2018-2022-final plan FINAL.pdf](https://www.tsl.texas.gov/sites/default/files/public/tslac/ld/pubs/lstaplan/LSTA%202018-2022-final%20plan%20FINAL.pdf)).

Needs

- All Texans and Texas communities need access to Internet-connected resources and services and support to use the resources and services to meet individual and community needs.
- Texans of all ages need access to resources and services that promote and enhance literacy and further formal and informal learning.
- Texans need access to resources and services for workforce development in order to prosper and enhance the economic development of their communities.

Goals

- Texans and Texas communities will have access to Internet connected resources and services through Texas libraries to meet community and personal goals and the support needed to use the resources and services successfully.
- Texans will receive library services that effectively respond to community needs.

This reimbursement grant program will fund operating expenditures such as library supplies and materials, technology, furniture, and contractual services. To be eligible, grant expenses must be reasonable and in accordance with appropriate state or local operating policies and procedures.

B. Award Information

At least \$800,000 available for TSLAC Digital Navigator Grant Program. Funding is provided by the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) under American Rescue Plan Act (P.L. 117-2) and the Library Services and Technology Act.

Federal Award Identification Number (FAIN): LS-250239-OLS-21 Assistance

Listing Number/Title: 45.310 State Library Program **Maximum Award**

Libraries with a single location may apply for a maximum of \$70,000. Multi-branch libraries may add \$10,000 per branch. Total grant award may not exceed \$300,000.

Example: If a library has a main location and two branch locations, they may apply for the base grant amount of \$70,000 and add an additional \$10,000 for each branch location for a total request of \$90,000.

Length of Funding

The Texas Digital Navigator Grant Program will open for application in September 2021 with an award date in November 2021. All funded projects must be completed by November 30, 2022. All grant funds **MUST BE OBLIGATED** by October 31, 2022.

C. Eligibility Information

Through their governing authority, accredited public libraries, local public library systems, libraries that are members of the TexShare Library Consortium, or non-profit organizations that are applying on behalf of accredited libraries and/or TexShare members, are eligible to apply for funds. Public library applicants must be accredited by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission for the fiscal year in which the grant contracts are issued.

There is no requirement for cost sharing, matching funds, or cost participation with this grant program.

Eligible Activities

This grant program will fund projects focused on implementing a Digital Navigator program within the library's community. Suggested supplies, materials, and services are listed below. This list is not exhaustive and is provided to aid your planning process:

- Project management of the pilot project (using Software As Service {SaaS}* , consultant, or contract help)
SaaS - Software as a Service (this grant award will only cover SaaS from 12/1/2021- 11/30/2022)
- Digital Navigator fees (salaries, wages and/or benefits for contract temporary help)
- Marketing the availability of Digital Navigators to target communities (may be print or digital and includes postage, printing, signage)
- Refurbished laptops or tablets for distribution to identified underserved community members
- Digital literacy databases or assessments (dissimilar to TexShare or TexQuest offerings)
- Training – patron and/or staff
- Professional services (workshop speakers, graphic design, etc.)

The grant may also cover indirect costs as permitted in 2 CFR 200.

Ineligible Activities

This grant program will **NOT** fund the following costs:

- a) Capital expenditures related to the purchase of real property, buildings, or motor vehicles
- b) Capital expenditures related to the construction or expansion of facilities, including fixtures and services

- c) Capital expenditures related to renovation costs, including fixtures and services
- d) Food, beverages, or food delivery equipment or services
- e) Awards, honoraria, prizes, or gifts
- f) Equipment or technology not specifically associated with pandemic services and programs.
- g) Transportation/travel for participants or library personnel
- h) Databases currently offered or similar to ones offered by the agency (i.e., a magazine index database may not be purchased if a comparable one is provided by the agency)
- i) Collection development purchases not specifically associated with pandemic services and programs
- j) Advertising or public relations costs not specifically associated with the pandemic services and programs
- k) Performers or presenters whose purpose is to entertain rather than to educate
- l) Staffing or fringe benefit costs
- m) Other expenses as excluded in the guidelines

D. Application and Submission Information

Application Components

The grant application consists of the following components:

1. Application Certification Form signed by appropriate signing authority
2. Program narrative and budget
3. Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) certification form

Grant Management System (GMS) Access

TSLAC uses a grant management system or GMS that enables applicants to apply for grants electronically through a web portal at <https://grants.tsl.texas.gov>. Applications and required documents must be submitted in GMS by the due date to be eligible for consideration. To submit your application online, you must have an active GMS account. To create or activate an account, please have your library director submit a contact import form (https://www.tsl.texas.gov/sites/default/files/public/tslac/ld/funding/lsta/Contact_Import_Template.xls) to grants@tsl.texas.gov. The e-mail should reference "GMS Access" in the subject line. TSLAC staff will review the request and grant appropriate access.

If needed because of difficulty using the Internet or for other accessibility reasons, potential applicants may submit copies of materials to Bethany Wilson, TSLAC Grants Administrator, via e-mail at grants@tsl.texas.gov.

The fillable PDF version of this application and all other application components can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/sfrwtzv3>

Other requirements

Before submitting an application, the applicant organization must have a current and active D-U-N-S® Number. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number may be found on D&B's website (<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/organization-registration/step-1-obtain-duns-number.html>). Obtaining a DUNS number is free.

Who can submit the application?

Any individual authorized to use GMS and having the correct security role will be able to submit the application in GMS. Applicants will be required to submit the signed application certification. The application certification must be signed by an individual authorized to enter into contracts with the State of Texas (e.g., county judge, city manager, etc.).

Deadline and Submission

Completed applications and ***all*** required documents must be submitted **by 11:59 p.m. Central Time, Friday, October 1, 2021**. *Please be advised that technical support will not be available after 4 p.m., Friday, October 1, 2021.*

If you are unable to submit your application and/or required documentation via GMS, you may submit documents via e-mail to grants@tsl.texas.gov with subject line, **Texas Digital Navigators Grant**. Please send mail submissions to:

Texas Digital Navigators Grant
Texas State Library and Archives Commission
Library Development & Networking Division PO
Box 12927 (1201 Brazos St.)
Austin, TX 78711 (78701)

Program Timeline

August 2021	Guidelines released
September 2021	Applications open
October 1, 2021	Applications and required forms due
October 2021	Application packets evaluated by Grant Review Panel
October 2021	Applicants notified of Grant Review Panel recommendations
November 2021	Commission meets and approves projects
November 2021	Contracts issued to grant recipients
December 1, 2021	Projects begin
October 31, 2022	All project funds obligated
November 30, 2022	Projects end

E. Application Review Information

Criteria for Award

This grant program is competitive. Agency staff will score proposals on the four criteria listed below. The maximum number of points for each category is listed.

The detailed scoring rubric that will be used is provided below.

1. Needs Assessment (50 points)

Provide details about the community you serve, including information about vulnerable community members. Describe identified community needs related to digital inclusion, Internet access, or digital literacy that could be addressed by a Digital Navigators project.

- Use the [TSLAC Community Profile Data worksheet](#) (.docx) to find demographic information, computer and internet usage statistics and assistance identifying potential community partners for this project.

2. Project Purpose (25 points)

Describe how you might implement a Digital Navigator project and how it would meet the needs of vulnerable community members described in the response to question 1.

- Describe why this project is a good fit for your community.

- Describe who you might partner with to implement your project.

- Describe specific population(s) you would assist with your project.

3. Sustainability (20 points)

Provide details about the support you will have to implement and maintain this project.

- Describe the financial and managerial resources that will be used to support the Digital Navigators project beyond the end of the grant.
- Describe the library's existing and potential partnerships that would support this project.
- Describe how this project aligns with the library's mission.

4. Personnel (5 points)

Provide details about who will participate in the Digital Navigator project.

- Identify who will attend the training and participate in the Digital Navigators project.
- Describe why they are a good fit for this project.

Funding Decisions

- (a) The agency staff will submit a recommended priority-ranked list of applicants for possible funding. Final approval of a grant award is solely at the determination of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.
- (b) Applications for grant funding will be evaluated only upon the information provided in the written application.
- (c) The agency staff may negotiate with selected applicants to determine the terms of the award. To receive an award, the applicant must accept any additional or special terms and conditions listed in the grant contract and any changes in the grant application.
- (d) The agency staff will notify unsuccessful applicants in writing.

Awarding of Grants

The commission has the right to reject applications or cancel or modify a grant solicitation at any point before a contract is signed. The award of any grant is subject to the availability of funds.

TSLAC Staff Responsibility

Agency staff will review each application packet for the following:

- Legal eligibility of the institution to participate in this grant program and appropriate authorizing signature
- Conformance to the federal and state regulations pertaining to grants
- Inclusion of unallowable costs
- Errors in arithmetic or cost calculations
- Submission of all required forms
- Compliance with submission procedures and deadlines
- Relevance and appropriateness of the project design and activities to the purpose of the grant program

Agency staff will raise issues and questions regarding the needs, methods, staffing, and costs of the applications. Staff will also raise concerns regarding the relevance and appropriateness of the project design and activities to the purpose of the grant program.

Applications with significant errors, omissions, or eligibility issues will not be rated. Applications in which the project design and activities are not relevant and appropriate to the purpose of the grant program will be ineligible.

Grant Review Panel Responsibility

Agency staff will review and score grants based on established criteria under an expedited process.

Decision Making Process

To be considered eligible for funding by the commission, any application must receive a minimum adjusted mean score of more than 60 percent of the maximum points available. To reduce the impact of scores that are

exceedingly high or low, or otherwise outside the range of scores from other reviewers, agency staff will tabulate the panel's work using calculations such as an adjusted mean score.

- (1) Applications will be ranked in priority order by score for consideration by the commission.
- (2) If insufficient funds remain to fully fund the next application, the staff will negotiate a reduced grant with the next ranked applicant.
- (3) If the panel recommends funding an application that, for legal, fiscal, or other reasons, is unacceptable to the staff, a contrary recommendation will be made. The applicant will be informed of this situation prior to presentation to the commission and may negotiate a revision to the application. A positive recommendation to the commission will be contingent upon successfully completing these negotiations prior to the commission meeting.
- (4) If the panel is unable to produce a set of recommendations for funding, the agency staff will use the same evaluation procedures to develop recommendations to the commission.

Scoring Rubric

Project Scoring Total in Four Areas: 100 points		
Relevance and appropriateness of the project design and activities to the purpose of the Texas Digital Navigators grant program will be considered in the scoring of all criteria. Staff may score each criterion as follows:		
0-1 points: Project does not meet the purposes of the grant program. 2-3 points: Project partially meets the purposes of the grant program. 4-5 points: Project is a clear fit for the purposes of the grant program.		
1) Needs Assessment (Points: Raw score = 5 max, weight = 10; Final score = 50 max)		
Describe identified community needs that a Digital Navigators project would address and include how participation in the grant would benefit vulnerable community members.		
0-1 points	2-3 points	4-5 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience is not described. • Does not describe community need • Does not describe how the project would benefit vulnerable community members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience is described but does not use data or statistics. • Provides partial description of community need. • Provides partial description of how the project would benefit vulnerable community members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience is defined with specific examples and statistics. • Clearly describes community need. • Clearly describes how the project would benefit vulnerable community members.
2) Project Purpose (Points: Raw score = 5 max, weight = 5; Final score = 25 max)		
Describe the specific Digital Navigators project you are planning and how it can meet the identified community needs described in the response to question 1.		
0-1 points	2-3 points	4-5 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides no evidence of need for Digital Navigators in community. • Project purpose is unclear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides some evidence of need for Digital Navigators in community. • Project purpose is defined and has some relationship to community needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides clear evidence of need for Digital Navigators in community. • Project purpose is clearly defined and is strongly related to community need.
3) Sustainability (Points: Raw Score = 5 max, weight = 2; Final score = 10 max)		
Describe the financial resources and partnerships that will be used to support the Digital Navigators project in the future, beyond the end of the grant.		
0-1 points	2-3 points	4-5 points

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of resources used to support and sustain the project after grant completion is vague and unspecific. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some evidence of future support and sustainability described. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear evidence of sustainability described. A written commitment of future support from governing bodies is provided, if applicable.
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4) Personnel (Points: Raw Score = 5 max, weight = 1; Final score = 5 max)		
Provide details about who will participate in the Digital Navigator project and their qualifications for doing so.		
0-1 points	2-3 points	4-5 points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No description of key personnel and their qualifications to perform these duties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some description of key personnel and their qualifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes qualifications of key personnel in detail, including how they will contribute to the project's success.

F. Award Administration Information

Notice of Award

Applicants will be notified of the funding decisions via e-mail. The notification will include an award letter and protest procedures, which are also included in this notice.

Once the awards have been awarded, successful applicants will receive instructions on how to proceed. TSLAC will provide mandatory training for successful applicants.

Protest Procedure — Texas State Library and Archives Commission, 13 TAC §2.55

- (a) An aggrieved person who is not satisfied with a decision, procedure, or service received from the staff of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission or who is an actual or prospective bidder, grantee, or contractor aggrieved in connection with a solicitation, evaluation, or award may file a protest with the Director and Librarian in accordance with this rule.
- (b) A protest must be submitted to the Director and Librarian within 21 days after the person knows or should have known of the matter which is protested. The Director and Librarian has the discretion to allow a protest filed after 21 days if the protestant shows good cause for the late filing or if the protest raises an issue significant to the general policies and procedures of the commission.
- (c) The protestant shall mail or deliver a copy of the protest to all interested persons. The Director and Librarian will furnish a list of interested persons to a protestant. For protests of a competitive selection (bid, contract, or grant), interested persons shall include all persons who have submitted a bid, proposal, or application.
- (d) A protest must be in writing and identified as a protest under this section, and contain the following:
 - (1) A description of the protestant's interest in the matter
 - (2) The issue(s) to be resolved and remedy(s) requested
 - (3) The protestant's argument supporting the protest, including a statement of relevant facts and applicable law, specifying the statutes, rules, or other legal authority alleged to have been violated
 - (4) The protestant's affirmation that facts set forth in the protest are true
 - (5) A certification that a copy of the protest has been mailed or delivered to all interested persons
- (e) Upon receipt of a protest conforming to the requirements of this section, the commission shall not proceed with the solicitation, award, or contract until the protest is resolved, unless the Director and Librarian makes a written determination that delay would harm the substantial interests of the state.

- (f) The Director and Librarian has the authority to decide, settle, or resolve the protest and will make a written determination. The Director and Librarian may solicit written responses to the protest from other parties. The Director and Librarian shall inform the protesting party and other interested parties by letter of his determination, and how to appeal the determination to the commission.
- (g) An interested party may appeal the determination of the Director and Librarian. An appeal must be in writing and conform to paragraphs (1) - (3) of this subsection:
- (1) The appeal must be received in the office of the Director and Librarian no later than 15 days after the date the determination is mailed to interested parties;
 - (2) A copy of the appeal must be mailed or delivered by the appealing party to all interested parties and contain a certification of mailing or delivery;
 - (3) The appealing party must state whether or not an opportunity is requested to make an oral presentation to the commission in open meeting.
- (h) The Director and Librarian shall refer the matter to the commission for their consideration at an open meeting.
- (i) The chair of the commission has the discretion to allow an appeal filed more than 15 days after the Director and Librarian's determination if the appealing party shows good cause for the late filing or if the appeal raises an issue significant to the general policies or procedures of the commission.
- (j) An interested party may file a response to an appeal of the determination of the Director and Librarian no later than seven days after the appeal is mailed or delivered.
- (k) Copies of the appeal and responses of interested parties, if any, shall be mailed to the commission by the Director and Librarian.
- (l) The chair of the commission has the discretion to decide whether or not a request for oral presentations will be granted and will set the order and amount of time for oral presentations that are allowed. The chair also has the discretion to decide whether presentations and written documents presented by Commission staff and interested parties will be allowed.
- (m) The commission will determine properly filed appeals and make its decision in open meeting. The commission shall vote to uphold or reverse the decision of the Director and Librarian. Failing a majority vote of a quorum of the commission, the Director and Librarian's decision is upheld. The commission's decision is final and not subject to judicial review under the statutes governing the commission.
- (n) A decision issued either by the commission in open meeting or in writing by the Director and Librarian shall be the final administrative action of the commission.
- (o) Documentation concerning a protest of a competitive selection is part of the commission's records series for that selection and is retained in accordance with the commission's approved records retention schedule.

Policy Requirements

TSLAC competitive grant recipients are subject to the State of Texas Uniform Grant Management Standards (UGMS) (<https://www.comptroller.texas.gov/purchasing/docs/ugms.pdf>) and federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (also known as the Supercircular) (<https://federalregister.gov/a/2013-30465>).

Reporting

Grantees must submit financial and performance reports at the end of the reporting period as will be outlined in the grant contract. Reports will be submitted electronically through TSLAC's Grant Management System (GMS).

G. Contacts

TSLAC staff members are available via e-mail during regular business hours (8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Central) to assist with competitive grants.

Digital Navigators

Bethany Wilson, Grants Administrator
Phone: 512-463-5527, 800-252-9386 (toll free)
Fax: 512-936-2306
E-mail: bwilson@tsl.texas.gov

Erica McCormick, Program Coordinator
E-mail: emccormick@tsl.texas.gov