

Connecticut State Library: Designing and Implementing a Replicable Regional Navigator Sharing Plan

Project Overview:

The CT State Library (CSL), as the lead SLAA in a collaboration with 8 public libraries, requests \$249,948 with \$95,473.04 provided in cost share by partners (Project Type: NLG-Implementation) to design and implement, over a 2-year grant cycle, a replicable model for regional sharing of digital navigation services to low-income underserved residents. The Regional Digital Navigator Sharing Plan will build upon the Salt Lake City navigator model adapted in 2021-2022 by four CT State Library-administered Digital Navigator Pilot Projects, and it will enrich that model to facilitate the participation of libraries who do not have the capacity to independently deploy a team of navigators via a regional collaboration, simultaneously demonstrating efficiencies of scale. The Regional Navigator Sharing Plan will be designed to connect with 2,000 residents in need, meaningfully distribute 300 computers, advance understanding of the benefits and viability of navigation via media interviews and conference presentations, create a toolkit for replication of such a regional sharing collaboration, and expand the layer of library staff with digital inclusion service experience. Most importantly, the replicable plan that is codified will be strategically disseminated to libraries across the nation that currently suffer low navigation capacity, especially small and rural libraries, increasing the possibility that they can engage in the development of the digital inclusion ecosystem in their region. The implementation of this model can also be expected to inform those responsible for Digital Equity Act projects in various states of ways to introduce centralization and efficiencies into the smaller navigation project models with which they are familiar. It will simultaneously document a regional resource sharing collaboration that could inform related but distinct library services.

This proposal responds directly to the National Leadership Grant Goal 2, Objective 2.1, in that it enhances replicable library models and tools to engage communities and individuals of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in digital inclusion activities that will increase the capacity of participants to move forward to access employment, health services, legal services, social benefits, and civic life, and in this way advance the effort to achieve social equity. Further, this digital navigator model depends on effective partnerships, of the type supported by Objective 2.2, as this increases the likelihood that navigators will be trusted mentors in the communities targeted. In addition, this project fulfills Objective 3.1 of Goal 3, in that the results include an increase in the number of residents connected, technologically supported, and with the digital literacy skills to accomplish their life goals.

Project Justification:

According to the IMLS Library Search & Compare data tool, there are 7,348 libraries nationwide with 14 or fewer paid staff people. There are 3,964 libraries classified as rural. While most librarians feel called to develop the digital inclusion ecosystem in their catchment areas, thousands of institutions lack the staffing capacity to field digital navigators on their own. Many larger town libraries with larger paid staff still lack the funding to independently field navigators. Models that will allow such libraries to participate in the advancement of the digital inclusion ecosystem are needed and the utilization of regional resource sharing concepts must be available to them if they are to be able to participate fully in the state processes begun with planning to spend new federal funds for connectivity. Thus, this plan, with its projection of disseminating intermittent intracycle reports and a final toolkit, is expected to have national impact.

As part of the process surrounding the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Act (BEAD), Congress found the following: (1) Access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband is essential to full participation in modern life in the United States. (2) The persistent “digital divide” in the United States is a barrier to the economic competitiveness of the United States and equitable distribution of essential public services, including health care and education. (3) The digital divide disproportionately affects communities of color, lower-income areas, and rural areas, and the benefits of broadband should be broadly enjoyed by all. (4) In many communities across the country, increased competition among

broadband providers has the potential to offer consumers more affordable, high-quality options for broadband service. (5) The 2019 novel coronavirus pandemic has underscored the critical importance of affordable, high-speed broadband for individuals, families, and communities to be able to work, learn and connect remotely while supporting social distancing.

Data from many recent studies strongly suggests that a broadband infrastructure buildout unaccompanied by a comprehensive digital inclusion program will fail to achieve the levels of adoption by underserved residents that are understood to lead to significant social and economic change.¹ That is, it has been demonstrated that equity cannot be achieved with infrastructure alone. The aim of investment plans must not be simply broadband access, but “meaningful internet access.” The latter is a dynamic concept that combines high-speed internet service; computing equipment of sufficient computing power for multiple household residents to use for work, education, and government access; technical skills; and digital literacy skills at the level that will allow residents to improve their lives.²

As the authors of “A Human Approach to Closing the Digital Divide” noted in a June 2022 article, one reason that the digital divide remains so wide is that “a key driver of the problem—adoption—has gone largely unaddressed.” They point out that the investment in digital adoption measures is falling far behind the investment in broadband infrastructure and programs to advance affordability. The elements of a comprehensive digital inclusion program capable of increasing adoption and moving digital equity, i.e., a condition in which *all* individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy, must center digital navigation.³ Digital equity is necessary today for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. There are numerous digital navigation models being tested around the country. The Boston Consulting Group study identifies 4 navigation archetypes that have been shown to be successful and one of these archetypes, the “digital inclusion specialist,” was proven to be successful in CT during the 2021-2022 Digital Navigation Pilot Projects. To close the adoption gap, the navigator models thus far developed by towns, libraries, and community organizations must be dramatically scaled up robustly funded. As state governments struggle to envision multi-year Digital Equity Act plans, digital navigation advocates must demonstrate not only that these many navigation models work, but also show that more centralized, cost-effective, and efficient navigator deployment, especially of the “digital inclusion specialist”-type, can move the needle on the number of under-connected residents served.

Libraries, beneficiaries of the IMLS-funded Salt Lake City Public Library Digital Navigator Program, and subsequent initiatives, have been able to build upon that model. The model has been further developed and codified in the 2022 Digital Inclusion Toolkit created by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and the New York Public Library. The model has so far been most useful to large urban libraries with a large staff, flexible budget, and robust community partnerships. Smaller libraries without adequate library space for navigator desks, lacking town approval for hiring navigators on a contractual or temporary basis, or with community partners without sufficient capacity to pick up the slack, have been left behind. Many of these smaller libraries are rural. Urban libraries functioning in depressed municipalities and without the funding to hire navigators are also in need of regional support. It is critical that the library community enrich navigator models in a way that will allow libraries with proven capacity for navigation

¹ Matt Kalmus, Hannah Hill, Jean Lee et al, “A Human Approach to Closing the Digital Divide, June 13, 2022, pg. 1, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2022/how-to-close-digital-divide-with-human-approach>, Accessed August 19, 2022.

² Lloyd Levine and Matthew P. H. Taylor, “Closing the Digital Divide: A Historic and Economic Justification for Government Intervention,” University of California Riverside School of Public Policy Working Paper, May 2018, <https://broadbandcouncil.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/68/2018/07/Closing-the-Digital-Divide-UC-Riverside-May-2018.pdf>, Accessed August 19, 2022.

³ “Digital Inclusion 101,” National Digital Inclusion Alliance, <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/digital-inclusion-101/>, Accessed August 19, 2022.

to collaborate with libraries in adjacent communities. A replicable model for sharing a multilingual and diverse pool of navigators among libraries and their partners on a regional basis is a necessary step on the road toward universally available navigation funded by the state.

Since the Salt Lake City Public Library Digital Navigator Program occurred, there has been much validation of the basic model. In a recent article, the Boston Consulting Group reported the results of a survey of 1500 people assisted by digital navigators and found that over 65% of them signed up for access or gained a computer at home. 80% of the respondents said that the navigators made them feel more confident and capable. The researchers for this study concluded that the digital navigator model, in which trained individuals based in community organizations provide “tailored support for the full spectrum of digital inclusion needs, from internet and device access to digital skill building,” works.⁴ In addition, their survey found that navigation had the greatest impact on adoption in the Black and Hispanic community. Around 64% of non-Hispanic respondents said that navigation resulted in adoption or device ownership. That percentage rose to the 72% of Black and Hispanic residents. Navigation by trained and trusted community members can be effective at addressing historic and structural obstacles head on. As this narrative will later report, the Connecticut Digital Navigation Pilot Projects of 2021-2022 confirmed these general national trends.

Community need in Connecticut is acute. According to “The Digital Divide in Connecticut,” a 2020 report commissioned by the Connecticut Council of Municipalities and the Dalio Foundation, the broadband adoption gap is dramatic, with 40% of households in Connecticut’s urban centers lacking wireline connections.⁵ The gap in terms of desktop or laptop computers ownership was equally stark. 31% of African Americans and 37% of Hispanics did not have a working computer at home. 33% of households with income below the state’s median income did not have a computer at home. Households that do not own computers are unlikely to be ready to “meaningfully access” high-speed broadband. Thus, the disparity in connectivity cannot be addressed by infrastructure alone. The lack of affordability of internet service, the lack of a computer suitable for education or work tasks,⁶ a lack of basic confidence about using the technology, and a lack of trust in commercial or government entities have been shown to be issues at the heart of the problem

Connecticut has already had experience with providing affordable, in this case, free, household internet service to the families of school children and found that an internet service subscription voucher did not necessarily lead to adoption. An analysis of the lower-than-expected adoption rates under the State of Connecticut Everybody Learns initiative demonstrated that distrust of, or unwillingness to engage with, cable companies, as well as concerns about privacy and the sharing of personal information, were cited as reasons why families did not sign up.⁷ Individualized mentorship based in a trusted community institution like the library and with navigators drawn from the community itself, on the other hand, was successful in signing up a relatively high percentage of clients for the Affordable Connectivity Plan or other low-cost home internet services via the CT Digital Navigation Pilot Projects, especially in the towns of East Hartford and Stamford.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John B. Horrigan, “The Digital Divide in Connecticut: How Digital Exclusion Falls Hardest on Low-Income Households in cities, Older Adults, Communities of Color, and Students,” September 2020, https://www.dalioeducation.org/Customer-Content/www/CMS/files/DigitalDivide_Report_2020_Final.pdf, Accessed August 19, 2022.

⁶ Large-screen devices are considered prerequisites for Digital Equity. For a summary of the arguments, see Amy L. Gonzales, “The Importance of Large-Screen Device Ownership: A Research Report, November 2021, <https://digitunity.org/news-information/device-ownership-matters-thank-you/>. Accessed August 23, 2022.

⁷ Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology, “Home Internet Connectivity: Barriers and Opportunities to Closing the Digital Divide for Connecticut Students, February 22, 2022, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/CTEdTech/publications/2021/2021_CET_K-12_Winter_Connectivity.pdf, Accessed August 19, 2022.

Large-screen computer ownership is increasingly understood to be an important element of digital inclusion. A November 2021 research report by Amy L. Gonzales, “The Importance of Large-Screen Device Ownership,” brings together conclusions from studies showing mobile only engagement with the internet is associated with the digital inequity experienced by low-income people, people of color, and people who have a low level of education. Mobile only access, according to Gonzales, limits the range of one’s online activity. Computer ownership, on the other hand, is associated with the psychological satisfaction that comes with control over a device, and, that control affects when and from where people can get online for job seeking, telehealth, or to end social isolation. The large gaps in device ownership documented in Connecticut suggest that the condition of digital equity will not be solved with the limited combination of broadband deployment and skills training but must include navigation that facilitates large-screen device distribution.

Experience also showed that low-income working adults often express how impossible it is to attend scheduled, large-group skills training sessions held at libraries alone. Navigators with the CT Digital Navigation Pilot Projects found individual appointments that were set according to difficult work schedules and transportation options allowed them to serve many who would not be able to organize for other types of skills and digital literacy training. The navigators of 3 of the 4 pilot projects met residents in the library, at fast-food restaurants between a needy individual’s work shifts, with parents showing up at summer camp, in a disaster recovery center for the victims of an apartment building fire, with eager trainees lined up for help at senior centers, and in barber shops.

As a group and in around 9 months of navigation, these libraries scheduled around 1600 navigation appointments and provided around 350 refurbished laptops or tablets to residents in need. They partnered with a dozen community organizations to provide at least some services in Spanish, Arabic, Haitian Creole, and Pashto. They learned that many residents need repeated encounters to get to the place of confidence they need for work, school, or health. They learned that it could take two to three hours to successfully assist the enrollment of a resident in the Affordable Connectivity Plan. (ACP statistics demonstrate that areas with navigator programs have more sign-ups.)⁸ Their stories have inspired other public libraries to seek town ARPA funds to launch digital navigation programs they can implement with community partners in senior centers, health centers, workforce development centers, veterans’ hospitals, and other organizations.

The experience of the four pilot projects confirmed that significant numbers of residents were truly in need of digital navigation services. Within the nine months of navigator deployments, the pilot libraries ultimately served over 700 unique clients. Almost half of these interactions led to multiple meetings between navigator and client and around half large-screen devices they needed to conduct job searches, take classes, find affordable housing, carry on telehealth appointments, communicate with family, or break their social isolation. Three of the four projects concluded with conversations with stakeholders that can led to at least a year of project sustainability.

The data and stories that each library gathered and took to their library boards, town officials, and other stakeholders were so compelling that the door for post-grant support and funding to maintain the program was opened in three of the four towns. Those three towns have found stakeholder support to sustain navigation work after the grant cycle ended. The fourth library opted to limit their digital inclusion work to previously established skills training and device distribution but is now also engaged with a youth workforce development program to train navigator interns to assist libraries.

⁸ John B. Horrigan, “Affordable Connectivity Plan Enrollment and Digital Equity Planning,” Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, Digital Beat, June 16, 2022, <https://www.benton.org/blog/affordable-connectivity-plan-enrollment-and-digital-equity-planning>, Accessed August 19, 2022.

Libraries mapped the local digital divide as part of their application process by using the American Community Survey (ACS) Table S2801, which provides the types of computers and internet connections by address, and Table S2802, which lists the types of internet subscriptions at addresses by selected characteristics (United States Census, 2016). In addition, they referenced the Connectivity Explorer, which combines the ACS data with service provider and other data (Connectivity Explorer, 2020). This exercise showed conclusively that even when a community has a relatively high wealth index, there is a part of the population comprising between 10% and 20% that is not sufficiently connected. This is the population from which the libraries, in consultation with partners, selected their target clients. Among the target audiences selected for services were low-income seniors, parents of K-12 students, graduating high school seniors losing their laptops, refugees, immigrant populations, and those involved in adult education or workforce training programs.

Bringing awareness of a service to a population that is not currently online requires thought. Pilot libraries undertook a variety of measures that in other circumstances might be considered out of date. These included sending mass mailings of postcards to all town residents, hiring teams to place doorhangers in targeted neighborhoods, hanging banners outside their libraries and in community partner spaces, soliciting partner referrals, presenting on radio shows, and being interviewed for local newspapers. Several libraries held outreach activities at Juneteenth festivals, stressing that digital equity is a civil rights issue. These methods resulted in residents in need of assistance requesting appointments to see a navigator in their town. The most effective promotional work was done by grateful clients who told friends, neighbors, fellow church members, and community organizers about the program. Several clients embedded in community work immediately shared what they had learned with fellow activists and created a buzz about the navigators' abilities to help them without inducing feelings of embarrassment or any loss of dignity.

These positive experiences go a long way toward highlighting what was confirmed by the pilot libraries about the criteria for hiring digital navigators. While navigators must have basic computer skills, most important is their capacity to interact with enthusiasm and patience with residents who may need long-term individualized tutoring. Others hired navigators with previous experience in social service settings or those already employed part-time by community organizations, with great attention to achieving a multilingual navigator pool and real representation of key segments of the targeted community. In the end, satisfied clients often mentioned in their exit interviews the patience of their navigator, as well as their navigator's ability to ascertain the pace of learning that would allow them to mark their elemental accomplishments and be inspired to go forward.

Navigators, project managers, and library staff all required an introduction to the pilot project and the challenges before them. The navigators first hired underwent several days of online training by the NDIA. Those hired later in the program were trained by the project manager and lead navigators. Staff who were expected to refer library users to the program were taught about navigation. Libraries supplied part-time navigators with cell phones, laptops, and workspace for scheduling appointments, meeting clients, and entering data. To produce the kind of data that would convince future funders of the need for an ongoing digital navigation program, pilot project libraries adapted a system advocated by the NDIA that included an intake form, a beginning skills assessment, follow-up surveys, and exit survey (samples are available through the National Digital Inclusion Alliance's Digital Navigator Model). The project was managed by either the library director, a department head, or a special part-time hire, usually a contractor. Project managers and navigators from the four pilot libraries held monthly meetings with each other and with staff from the NDIA. These were important for skills building and dealing with the impact of working with so many people with acute, but unmet needs. They were also able to participate in national monthly meetings of navigators from other projects around the country that are hosted by the same organization.

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Data from the pilot projects is still being fully analyzed but there are some key takeaways. Of the 700 unique clients, most sought to improve their digital skills. This was followed by those who needed a device and then, by those who needed a combination of the two. Most appointments lasted at least 30 minutes and often more. Half of the clients attended more than one meeting. Future need more attention to the first languages spoken in target communities. The enthusiasm and feelings of participants have been captured by the media. Interviews with navigators and clients from the four pilot projects were featured in a short video, "[Digital Navigators: Creating Equity and Inclusion in Connecticut Communities.](#)" (Farrell, 2022). Talks by community partners who had referred residents to a navigator may be viewed in the community voices section of the CT Network (CT-N) public television recording of an event called "[Advancing to Digital Equity in Connecticut](#)" (CT-N, 2022). These public and media events helped lay the foundation for town or philanthropic funds to sustain the projects at the end of the grant cycle.

Hamden Public Library gathered participants for an end-of-grant cycle community conversation at which town officials, librarians, navigators, and community leaders discussed "How can the library and your organization close Hamden's digital divide?" Participants were invited to share their ideas about how to create a town-wide digital safety net and came up with new ideas for coordination and funding to expand the digital ecosystem in their town. In addition, project coordinators and navigators have made themselves available for highly successful workshops sponsored by CT State Library Continuing Education workshop series, at the CT Education Network Annual Conference, and the CT Library Association annual conferences, and are applying to present at the annual New England Library Association conference, which many rural libraries attend. The project manager of the pilot projects has been sought out for discussions by numerous other state library staff members to discuss results.

Work Plan:

The model for the proposed implementation project organizes navigation collaboration between 8 public libraries, with the Hamden Public Library, which successfully implemented a 2021-2022 Digital Navigator Pilot Project, functioning as a hub for 3 new regional navigator training and deployment, device storage, and as the working centralized repository for data archiving. Libraries with functioning in-house navigators will add one to the regional pool that will libraries in navigator need. An experienced project coordinator on-site at the Hamden Public Library will, in consultation with liaisons assigned by each of the 7 other libraries, will deploy the common pool of special language and other navigators as requested. The funds awarded will be distributed as a subaward to the Hamden Public Library, whose director will hire navigators and oversee the new hires, the project coordinator, and a data coordinator. Dawn LaValle, the Director of the CT State Library Division of Library Development will administer the NLG Implementation grant. Christine Gauvreau, the digital inclusion consultant at the CSL Division of Library Development, will serve as project manager and oversee the expenditure of a major subaward to the Hamden Public Library.

Each of the public libraries in the project--- Hamden, New Haven, Bridgeport, West Haven, Woodbridge, Wallingford, Derby, and Naugatuck---will assign a staff person to liaise on a weekly basis with the project coordinator, sharing information about clients seeking navigation via the regional sharing plan priorities, and, in turn, responding to queries from the project coordinator about the availability of their in-house navigators to respond to specific client requests for appointments. That is, the libraries not hosting the project coordinator and 4 special language navigators will provide director time and staff time to see that the needs assessments, partner and targeted community outreach and conversations, referrals to navigators, local device distribution logistics, and allocation of space for navigator appointments are all carried out collaboratively under the direction of the project coordinator from the Hamden hub. Should a situation develop in which immediate need is greater than regional navigation capacity, the smaller libraries with no navigators of their own, or with only modest navigation capacity involving only current full-time reference staff, will have their clients privileged by the regional sharing plan. Library directors, or in one case, an assigned alternate administrator, have also committed to the planning process to be carried out in

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the first six months and the data analysis and evaluation process to be implanted in the final six months of the process. All of these commitments are spelled out in their Letters of Commitment now gathered in Supplemental document 5 and their capacity for this work is documented in the resumes gathered in the attached Resumes pdf.

New navigators will be trained soon after hiring utilizing a 3-class curriculum developed by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, codified in the Hamden Digital Navigator Learning Guide, and led by experienced Connecticut navigators and the Project Coordinator from the Hamden hub. Northstar Digital Literacy modules, now freely available through the CT State Library, will be incorporated. One conclusion of the Pilot Projects is that navigators need training on accessibility software and devices, especially for residents with low vision. Navigators will be supported during the year of navigation by their own monthly peer group sessions in which they can share experiences, problems, and solutions. During the 2021-2022 Digital Navigator Pilot Projects, such sessions were facilitated by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. Their curriculum for navigators will be the base of the training. Thanks to the development in Connecticut of a modest but experienced navigator pool, the regional navigator sharing plan will rely on the project coordinator and those navigators already working at the larger capacity libraries to create supplemental peer to peer sessions that allow for continuous navigator skill improvement. Guidance for navigators developed by the Hamden Public Library, and found in Supplemental document 2, will be used as well. Navigators will also be encouraged to schedule participation in the monthly *national* navigator peer to peer sessions organized by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, during which they will be able to both take advantage and contribute to the emerging knowledge base reflected therein. Monthly office hours will also be held by the project coordinator and manager to make asking help something that can become routine.

The hiring process will adapt the one used by Hamden Public Library for the 2021-2022 Pilot project. The Hamden Public Library job descriptions are grounded by the basic job descriptions provided in the 2022 Digital Inclusion Toolkit created by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance in collaboration with the New York Public Library and can be found in Supplemental document 7. Convinced that the main criteria for a successful navigator are the ability to work patiently and with empathy and generosity with community residents, applicants will be asked in advance to prepare a navigation demonstration session to take place adjacent to their in-person interview at which their people skills and language skills can be assessed by librarians with help from community partners with language expertise in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, or Arabic.

The project will launch in August of 2023 with the first six months devoted to deepening community needs assessments, integrating partners into target audience identification and developing navigator deployment sites, hiring navigators, training navigators and relevant library staff in digital inclusion practices and principles, purchasing equipment, and tweaking a projected workflow in response to the views of community partners. During the middle 12 months, regional navigators will be deployed in collaboration with partners and participating libraries. The final six-month period of the 2-year cycle will be devoted to data analysis, a collaborative qualitative assessment process with libraries and partners, and the authoring of a draft final report and a toolkit useful for replication of a regional sharing plan. The start and end dates for each activity can be seen on the attached Schedule of Completion.

Libraries committed to the Regional Navigator Sharing Plan have begun identifying partners to whom they will begin outreach this spring and summer, with the goal of at least one August 2022 community conversation with multiple partners in each participant library catchment area. These conversations will use an adaptation of the Aspen Guide model for scripting conversations with community organizations, agencies, and service organizations who hope to connect their clients and neighbors with navigation evaluation appointments, computers, and skills training. Ideally, each library will develop an ongoing relationship that meets partner expectations for minimum and maximum engagement. At minimum, libraries hope to be responsive to clients who will be identified by partners and to develop a

collaborative assessment of the successes and failures of navigation. Because the libraries involved have different levels of experience with community conversations, the regional team will assist where needed.

Already targeted for outreach about the potential to help shape navigation work in communities associated with the small libraries expected to benefit the most from regional sharing and communities defined by primary languages other than English are organizations devoted to adult literacy, family and adult reentry, workforce development, child and family guidance, immigrant social clubs, churches with immigrant congregations, mosques, food banks, senior centers, senior group residences, community health centers, and a large veterans hospital.

Libraries committed to participation in the regional navigation sharing have been meeting to plan a way of working that will facilitate continuously improvement in the group's community needs awareness and partner engagement, as well as the regular sharing of lessons tentatively learned with the larger state and national digital inclusion ecosystem throughout the 2-year cycle. The group proposes that we have six meetings including directors, the project manager, the project coordinators, a portion of the regional navigator pool, and partners who desire such a level of engagement, across the grant cycle. These meetings would be held at the beginning and the end of the cycle, with 4 meetings in-between on a quarterly basis. The agenda of these meetings will include a review of outreach efforts, media coverage, exchanges with the broader digital inclusion ecosystem via conferences and meetings, navigation work completed, and the monitoring of partner relationships. Instead of limiting our reflection and codification of lessons learned to sessions at the end, we commit to a process of quarterly evaluation meetings that will allow us to adjust workflow, data collection, outreach, and community encounters. The scheduling of these meetings and community conversations, to which all library directors have committed in the Letters of Commitment found in Supplemental document 5, is laid out in the Schedule of Completion.

To implement the plan, the regional sharing team has developed a budget that anchors a subaward to Hamden Public Library of \$249,948, with \$107,325 going to navigator salaries; \$24,300 supporting a project coordinator; and \$6,750 for data coordination. For mileage for traveling navigators, \$4386 has been allocated. The laptop cost of \$99,750 is based on a quote from the trusted computer refurbishing non-profit Human-I-T. Other equipment costs in the expenditure plan include \$1200 for cell phones for three newly hired navigator and \$1992 for data collection software tested by the pilot project at Hamden Public Library. Materials for use in publicizing navigation services, including brochures, yard signs, and banners amount to \$3,345. A cost share is not required for this grant, but 7 library directors have committed to provide 6 hours a month for tasks that include planning, community partner communication, and quarterly meetings. The director of the Hamden Public Library hub will be providing 10 hours a month of time to tasks that include hiring, overseeing training, and hub operations. Liaisons are expected to provide one hour a week of cost share expenditures.

Diversity Plan:

The regional grouping self-selected to pilot this navigator sharing plan was attracted to original proposal because it promised to facilitate the hiring, training, and sharing of contractors with the capacity to serve residents from at least the following language groups: Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Arabic. The number of Spanish-speaking residents in CT grew 30% between the 2010 and 2020 census. In one of the smaller libraries set to benefit from navigator sharing, Naugatuck is the site of an increasingly foreign-born population, with residents from Cape Verde and Brazil making up the largest new Portuguese-speaking language group. The Bridgeport Public Library has been struggling to connect with a growing Arabic-speaking population. Haitian Creole is key to hospitality workforce development work in the region. Successfully hiring and deploying navigators with the skills to serve these populations will be critical to informing the state digital equity planning process about the scope of multilingual need in one region of the state.

One of the conclusions that both the library directors of the Digital Navigation Pilot Projects and those committed to the Replicable Regional Navigator Sharing Plan have come is that neither complete centralization nor complete localization of a regional or state navigator pool was desirable. Our diversity plan will try to combine two approaches that together will maximize our ability to effectively serve people of color and of diverse national origins. Due to capacity limitations, the special language navigators will be centralized and deployed throughout the regional grouping. Due to the need to ground navigation in specific community support systems of trust, the team will urge participant libraries with their own navigator pools to privilege hiring directly from the most local community of need. Thus, our plan will include deliberate efforts to deploy a navigator pool that is diverse enough to both meet the needs of select special language groups while retaining direct links to more local populations.

Project Results:

Project results will include the creation of five kinds of information necessary for replication of regional digital navigation sharing models: (1) documentation of navigation efforts and results by client and appointment; (2) results of surveys of navigators regarding training, support, and job satisfaction; (3) intermittent written workflow evaluations; (3) intermittent evaluation of the success of outreach to target clients; (4) a compilation of the qualitative responses of community conversations with library partners with a stake in successful navigation outcomes; and (5) participating library levels of satisfaction with the sharing model. Together, these results will provide a means of measuring the need for navigation, client attainments and satisfaction with navigation, possible levels of staff and community partner engagement with navigation efforts, and the limits and possibilities of navigation team sharing. A detailed breakdown of the data we will collect, the source of our data, the methods of data collection we will use, and the schedule of all, may be found in the Performance Measurement document that is attached.

Our navigation data scheme will allow us to capture rich information about who has sought digital inclusion assistance, their level of need in relation to their individual goals, and the effectiveness, efficiency, quality, and timeliness of the navigation offered. The templates, which include forms for intake, skills assessment, appointment notes, and exit surveys, will be based on templates that originated with the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and were modified during the 2020-2021 Digital Navigator Pilot Project at the Hamden Public Library. These have been attached in Supplemental document 1. This data will be captured for the 12-month period of navigation on a daily basis using templates that include intake forms (anonymized ID number, zip code, assigned navigator, preferred language, by whom referred, device ownership, device in use, issues to be resolved divided by categories including hardware, software, home connectivity, digital skills needed, information desired, task to be completed, detailed notes, start date), skills assessment, in route visit summaries (length of visit, location of visit, instruction completed, device assigned, recommendations), and exit surveys. The latter survey will include the following questions:

Were you able to accomplish your digital literacy goal? I feel confident using the Internet. I know how to keep my information safe and secure online. Can we contact you to follow-up on your experience with this program? Did you feel welcomed, included, and respected? Did you receive support and instruction in a language you understood? Did you receive a device? Did you get help signing up for internet? Were you enrolled in ACP? Date at which you concluded appointments.

Navigator survey responses and notes will be collected before quarterly meetings and will ask respondents to identify successes and complications in the workflow, to note the presence or failure of timely adjustments to workflow, to identify level of confidence in carrying out assignments, and level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with navigation process. The survey will be adapted from the IMLS LSTA staff satisfaction survey for planning projects.

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The quarterly meetings are expected create space for oral qualitative assessments from library directors and team coordinators that will be compiled in written form to include lessons learned, changes that need to be made, media opportunities, conference presentation proposals, etc. The project manager will be preparing and organizing these meetings of directors and team staff to assure effective and timely publicity to target clients, community partner communication, review of data collection and content, and progress toward plan goals. Given the concurrent unfolding of the state Digital Equity Plan, whose development is mandated by the federal Digital Equity Act 2022 Notice of Funding Opportunity, the team has the goal of using the quarterly meetings to agree upon progress reports that can be disseminated regularly to larger digital inclusion ecosystem in the state.

Community partner satisfaction will be measured via notes from community conversations with potential and actual library partners and stakeholders, including participants from town agencies, service organizations, community organizations, and others. Each library will, with support from the regional team, attempt to assemble community conversations in August and September 2023, well before navigation is to begin, and July 2025, after a year of navigation has been completed. These gatherings will be organized according to the principles of the Aspen Action Guide for scripting community conversations. Partners who want to join the quarterly meetings of the team to assess in cycle progress will be invited. Library directors or their assigned administrative alternates have also committed to regular informal outreach to partners throughout the cycle. In addition, the 2021-2022 Hamden Public Library Digital Navigation Pilot Project concluded with an event that the regional sharing team hopes to adapt to measure community engagement built via the regional sharing plan by hosting a concluding regional event at which the most active partners and community spokespeople come together to envision the sustainable digital navigation ecosystem that could result from the state Digital Equity Act planning and granting process, suggesting to the regional sharing team that such engagement, on a more frequent basis, may be possible. The Regional Navigator Sharing team sees value in attempting these sorts of gatherings on both the town and regional level in anticipation of Digital Inclusion Week 2024.

Given that the strategic dissemination of a regional navigator sharing model to achieve national impact is the stated goal, the Regional Navigator Sharing Plant team is committed to utilizing all venues and media to reach fellow librarians in need of navigator support. Presentations describing the model, and enriched by the elevation of community voices, will be offered to the larger state digital inclusion ecosystem via special media events, conference workshops, and intermittent, well-publicized reports to the monthly membership meetings of CT Libraries & Partners for Digital Equity, a project of the CT State Library that is supported by LSTA funds. Every effort will be made to see that the Regional Navigator Sharing Plan is made available through COSLA, COSLINE, the COSLA adult services working group in formation, the National Digital Inclusion list serve, community meetings, and peer group sessions. The CT State Library has a strong record of initiating panels and workshops at state, regional, and national conferences, and will apply that experience to promoting the Replicable Regional Navigator Sharing Plan on a national basis. Finally, just as we took responsibility to see that the lessons of the 2021-2022 Digital Navigator Pilot Projects were published quickly in a library journal, the team will make every effort to see that the regional sharing data and lessons are made freely available through publication, via a State Library Lib Guide and the CT Libraries & Partners for Digital Equity website. Confidence based on our previous digital navigation work is expressed in the Letters of Support from Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, CT Policy Advisor for the CT Digital Equity Plan Mark Raymond, and NDIA Director of Programs and Initiatives Kristi Zappie-Ferradino, all found in Supporting document 6.

Schedule of Completion: Connecticut State Library: Designing and Implementing a Replicable Regional Digital Navigator Plan: LG-252654-OLS

Activities	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24	June 24	July t 24
Beginning and End of Cycle + Quarterly meetings to evaluate process and results and adjust												
Opening Community Conversations with Partners												
Library collaboration to Fine-Tune Continuing Partner Work for Grant Cycle												
Library collaboration to Fine-Tune Outreach and Workflow for Navigation Period												
Advertising and Hiring Navigators												
Purchase and On-Site organization of laptops and tablets												
Training Navigators and Orienting Library Staff												
Media, library, and partner outreach to target clients												
Roll-out of navigator sharing												
Weekly Navigator Data Submission/Monthly Data Collation Reports Created												
Navigator Monthly CT Peer Sharing Sessions												
Navigator Monthly National Peer Sharing Sessions												
Media interviews, radio, and TV												
Presentations to New England and CT library conferences												
Presentations to state digital equity ecosystem												
Digital Inclusion Week												
Presentations to national digital equity ecosystem												
Data Wrangling to Produce Final Statistical Profile												
End of Navigation Cycle Analysis & Evaluation Process, Report creation												
Final Review of document outlining lessons of regional sharing model												

Activities	Aug 24	Sept 24	Oct 24	Dec 24	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Apr 25	May 25	June 25	July 25	Aug 25
Beginning and End of Cycle + Quarterly meetings to evaluate process and results and adjust												
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Digital Products Plan Summary:

The Replicable Regional Digital Navigator Sharing Plan of the Connecticut State Library will create an anonymized database that documents digital navigator interactions with clients over a 12-month period via Two Forms software and in spreadsheets that will be transferred to Excel for public access and long-term preservation at the Connecticut State Library. Graphic depictions of the spreadsheet data will be created in Tableau or Excel, preserved at the State Library, and made public and via the Connecticut State Library LibGuides. The data will also be summarized in a toolkit published on a Connecticut State Library LibGuide. Complete spreadsheets of anonymized data will be made available on request via a form on the LibGuide. Other project in-process materials will be retained in accordance with the Connecticut State Library 10-year retention policy.

Type: Data entry by navigators, overseen by a data coordinator, will be entered weekly onto anonymized client intake forms, skills assessment forms, appointment notes, and exit interview spreadsheets and then entered at least monthly on anonymized spreadsheets created via True Forms commercial software. The anonymized data collected on True Forms will be transferred to an Excel spreadsheet for free public access. Summaries of the anonymized navigation-client data will be included in narrative and graphic form in toolkit published electronically on a Connecticut State Library LibGuide. CSL LibGuides run on Springshare software and are maintained Connecticut State Library staff. Project email communications and intermittent process evaluation reports and notes will be preserved.

Availability: At the end of the project, the anonymized data collected, and the conclusions drawn and summarized from the data will be made freely available to the public on a LibGuide of the Connecticut State Library. Graphic representations of the data and a toolkit with a narrative that includes analysis of the data will also be made available to the public on a Connecticut State Library LibGuide to access, read, download, and analyze without charge. The full anonymized dataset in spreadsheet form will be available upon request. Project communications, in-process notes, and interim reports will be retained but not made public.

Access: There will be no charge or cost attached to accessing, reading, or downloading the data accrued during this project. All data collected on navigation activities will be anonymized during the process workflow. Original paper forms will be destroyed as data is collected. No client personal identification beyond zip code will be preserved or published.

Sustainability: Navigation data spreadsheets and reports, workflow charts, community conversation notes, beginning of cycle, end of cycle, and quarterly reports, as well as key communications that should be retained will be maintained on the Connecticut State Library network server. Paper copies will be archived in accordance with the relevant 10-year retention policies of the Connecticut State Library and will adequately preserve the information for a lifecycle reasonable for the quickly developing practice of digital navigation. Every attempt will be made to publish analyses of the project in professional journals that will have longevity.

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CSL disclaimers and permissions are found at: <https://ctstatelibrary.org/about/policies/disclaimers-and-permissions/>



Organizational Profile

A. Organizational Description.

The mission of the Connecticut State Library is to preserve and make accessible Connecticut's history and heritage and to advance the development of library services statewide.

The Connecticut State Library is an Executive Agency of the State of Connecticut. The State Library provides a variety of library, information, archival, public records, museum, and administrative services for citizens of Connecticut, as well as for employees and officials of all three branches of state government. The State Library also serves students, researchers, public libraries, and town governments throughout the state. In addition, the State Library through its Division of Library Development directs a program of statewide library development and administers the Library Services and Technology Act state grant. The Division of Library Development provides leadership, funding, education, and statewide services that enhance a local library's ability to deliver high-quality library service to their community. In the last several years, the Connecticut State Library has administered CT Libraries & Partners for Digital Equity, a network made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, as part of an effort to help libraries enrich the digital inclusion ecosystem in the state.

B. External Funding.: N/A

C. External Partnerships.

To advance the digital inclusion ecosystem in Connecticut, the State Library is partnering with 8 public libraries to develop, implement, and disseminate best practices for regional digital navigator sharing. The participating libraries are Hamden Public Library, Bridgeport Public Library, West Haven Public Library, Woodbridge Town Library, Derby Public Library, Howard Whittemore Library (Naugatuck), New Haven Free Public Library, and Wallingford Public Library.

