EQUITABLE INTERNET INITIATIVE

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Press Kit

The Equitable Internet Initiative (EII) supports and develops historically marginalized residents to build and maintain neighborhood-governed internet infrastructure that fosters accessibility, consent, safety and resilience.

This initiative is a collaboration between the Detroit Community Technology Project and three organizations in Detroit — Grace in Action Collectives in Southwest, Church of the Messiah in Islandview, and the North End Woodward Community Coalition (NEWCC) in the North End and Highland Park. We also have a partnership with Community Technology New York.

The goals of this initiative are to:

- Increase Internet access through the distribution of shared Gigabit Internet connections in three underserved neighborhoods

- Increase Internet adoption through a Digital Stewards training program that prepares residents of those same neighborhoods with the skills necessary to bring their communities online

- Increase pathways for youth into the opportunities of Detroit's burgeoning Innovation District through intermediate and advanced digital literacy trainings

EII also accelerates outreach, training, and wireless broadband Internet sharing on the neighborhood level in Detroit.

This press kit will provide more details about EII. Please contact our Administrative Manager at communitytech@alliedmedia.org with additional questions.

Sincerely,

Equitable Internet Initiative

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The History of EII and Digital Stewards

Detroit tops the list of "worst-connected cities" nationally, with nearly 60% of its residents lacking in-home broadband subscriptions and 40% lacking any connection whatsoever.[1] In Detroit, 38% of residents live below the federal poverty level[2] and since 2014, tens of thousands have faced water shut-offs and evictions due to tax foreclosure, many of which could have been prevented.[3] Overwhelmingly, Detroit's low-income, majority African American, population is not benefiting from the private investments, improvements in city services, and infrastructural developments taking place in the 7.2 mile area defined as Greater Downtown. Less than one percent of Detroit's population lives in Greater Downtown; it has the highest concentration of college-educated adults and an average per capita income that is roughly $20,000 compared to the $15,000 average for the city as a whole.[4]

> The Equitable Internet Initiative (EII) grew out of Allied Media Projects' nine-year track record of digital media education and community technology building in Detroit.

In 2012, Allied Media Projects (AMP) partnered with the Open Technology Institute of the New America Foundation to create the Digital Stewards Program. The program trains neighborhood leaders in designing and deploying community wireless networks with a commitment to the Detroit Digital Justice Principles, emphasizing access, participation, common ownership, and healthy communities. The following year, community wireless mesh networks were prototyped in five Detroit neighborhoods. Ultimately, the Digital Stewards Program led to the formation of the Detroit Community Technology Project in 2014. DCTP was developed to encompass broader community technology education and organizing work and to share best practices. To date, DCTP has implemented the Digital Stewards training with leaders from ten Detroit neighborhoods and has supported eleven community groups internationally to adopt and modify the training for their own contexts.

Because an uneven distribution of internet access in Detroit compounds existing inequalities and undermines social and economic welfare, DCTP began to develop the Equitable Internet Initiative (EII) in 2015. EII expands the efforts of past Digital Stewards programing to address the staggering digital inequality within the city of Detroit.

1 "America's Worst Connected Big Cities." Bill Callahan Redistributing the Future: Our Persistent Digital Divide, It's Consequences and Cures
2 United States Census: Quick Facts

3 "One Fifth of Detroit's Population Could Lose Their Homes." Rose Hackman. The Atlantic.
4 "Quantifying Downtown Detroit's Comeback." Richard Florida. City Lab.

PARTNERS

DCTP partnered with three anchor organizations in 2016. These organizations implemented EII programming in their respective neighborhoods.

BLVD Harambee

BLVD Harambee is a non-profit organization helping foster life skills and resources for the holistic development of young people in the neighborhood. (B=Building, L=Leaders, for V=Village, D=Development. Harambee means "all pull together" in Swahili) BLVD Harambee was created by the Episcopal Church of the Messiah to promote Empowerment, Education, Employment, Enlightenment and Entertainment.

Grace in Action Collectives

Grace in Action Collectives is a network of youth-run collectives and worker-owned cooperatives.

North End Woodward Community Coalition

North End Woodward Community Coalition was formed in 2011 as a transit justice organization advocating for public transit that is accessible, affordable, accountable, and equitable for those who are transit dependent. That road has led to work ranging from solar lighting to community powered radio. They have found that "voice and power" has taken many turns.

DCTP partnered with these organizations because of their track records of strong community engagement, youth leadership, and digital literacy programming. EII builds upon existing community technology programs at each site, which include a community makerspace, a youth-run technology collective, and a community radio station that focuses on developing local storytelling and journalism. Through their participation in EII, the community anchor organizations have grown their capacities to address the digital inequity in Detroit.

OUR WORK

We believe communication is a fundamental human right.
Through EII, we are creating the world we want to see by building
infrastructure that allows for participation, digital equity and access.

Our Goals

- Increase Internet access in underserved neighborhoods

- Increase Internet adoption through digital literacy programming

- Train and develop residents as Digital Stewards

- Strengthen neighborhoods through community organizing, participation, collaboration and resiliency

Our Approach

To address the lack of internet access in Detroit, EII:

- Supports EII partners with implementing programming in their neighborhood. EII supports these organizations in connecting residential homes of vulnerable populations located in low income neighborhoods to the internet as well as sustaining and expanding their networks.

- Develops and trains a skilled workforce of Digital Stewards (Community Technologists) to build network infrastructure ensure adoption, and host digital literacy programming.

- Implements neighborhood resilience strategies that include a local Intranet, wi-fi hotspots, solar charging stations, battery back-up systems, Portable Network Kits and neighborhood preparedness plans for emergencies/disasters.

- Honors net neutrality, privacy and consent in our client agreements and data gathering practices.

Grace in Action Digital Steward during an install

Digital Stewards

Digital Stewards build and maintain the network infrastructure, demystify technology for their communities and facilitate a healthy integration of technology into people's lives and communities, allowing them the fundamental human right to communicate.

They are community organizers, media makers, educators, artists and neighborhood leaders. They come from various neighborhoods, are people of color and range in age from elders to those in their teens. In 2018, they connected more than 150 homes across three neighborhoods.

Digital Stewards Training

DCTP's Digital Stewards training equipped neighborhood leaders in each of the three EII neighborhoods with the technical and community organizing skills necessary to redistribute Gigabit Internet connections and bring their communities online. The training includes wireless engineering, neighborhood mapping and network design, basic IT troubleshooting, community outreach, and engagement. Graduates of the Digital Stewards were then hired by each organization to complete the build-out and adoption of wireless networks in their neighborhoods.

As part of the Digital Stewards program, students surveyed their neighborhoods to determine why the Internet was important to the residents, what residents wished they knew about the Internet, and where they have access to the Internet in their neighborhood. This data was then used to determine each network's boundaries, purpose and priorities.

Network Priorities

People with no Internet connection at all

Households with children or adults participating in educational programs

Households with low connection

Households with one or more senior citizen(s)

Households participating in government assistance programs

Households that are unable to obtain a connection otherwise

Households that are located in vulnerable areas (flood zones, neighborhoods facing water shut-offs, etc.)

EQUITABLE INTERNET INITIATIVE
WORKING PRINCIPLES

> **The Equitable Internet Initiative (EII) is an effort to redistribute power, resources, and connectivity in Detroit through community Internet technologies.**

We are working towards a future where neighbors are authentically connected, with relationships of mutual aid that sustain the social, economic, and environmental health of neighborhoods.

We are working towards a future where Detroiters who have been marginalized from political and economic power have the ability to leverage Internet technologies to shape the future of their neighborhoods and city.

To ensure we reach this future, we work from the following principles to guide us along the way.

- We use and build technology for **collaborative problem solving**, so that we can address the immediate and long-term needs of our communities.

- We use and build technology for **storytelling**, so that we can foster understanding, trust, and empathy within and between our communities.

- We use and build technology for **education**, so that we can cultivate knowledge, talent, ideas, and imagination within our communities.

- We use and build technology for **organizing**, so that we can grow the power of our communities to transform systems of oppression.

- We facilitate **collaborative community ownership and governance** of technology infrastructure.

- We facilitate **long-term, authentic relationships** through our teaching and organizing processes.

- We use **alternative energy** whenever possible and encourage a culture of fixing and recycling tech in order to care for our environment and minimize waste.

- We support a **culture of consent** in media and technology to encourage and establish healthy boundaries, transparency, and mutually-supportive expression for our communities.

- We use technology to ensure the **safety and security of the community** through the growth of healthy and trusting relationships in the digital and Internet ecosystem.

- We elevate and protect the **privacy** of the individual, as well as the community as a whole, through safe and secure digital practices.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Communication Is a Fundamental Human Right

Technology and the Internet have the ability to transform our communities, assist in economic development, and help residents understand and utilize the power they already have.

Our work is rooted in building authentic relationships and ensuring that those most affected - poor and marginalized communities - are able to realize their power and take ownership in shaping the future in just, creative, and collaborative ways.

Digital Stewards from BLVD Harambee at an install
Photo by Hour Detroit Magazine

Community Technology Will Transform the Inequalities within Technology

Community Technology is a method of teaching and learning about technology with the goal of fostering and restoring relationships and healing neighborhoods. Community technologists are those who have the desire to build, design, and facilitate a healthy integration of technology into people's lives and communities, allowing them the fundamental human right to communicate, while learning how technology can support both needs and personal and collective visions.

Community Technology focuses on teaching strategies that make learning technology accessible and relevant. We believe sharing these teaching practices has the potential to diversify and shape technology fields to be community-oriented. The more people know about the technology around them, the more they will be able to participate in shaping their environment.

A spread from the Teaching Community Technology Handbook

The text within the image:

This handbook focuses on teaching strategies that make learning technology accessible and relevant. Those new or old to teaching will find this book useful in creating community-rooted technology programming and educational materials. We believe sharing these teaching practices has the potential to diversify and shape technology fields to be community-oriented.

To download the guide, editable worksheets, and editable templates, visit: detroitcommunitytech.org/teachcommtech

What Is Community Technology?

Education Is at the Core of the Transformation We Seek

We believe education is a continuous process of unlearning and relearning, acknowledging how learners may have been oppressed by the very tools and systems in which they are participating. Digital Stewards emphasize reflection and evaluation so as to shift media/technology from inaccessible systems to transparent and do-able processes, especially for learners who have historically been, and continue to be, disenfranchised by traditional schooling.

Our curriculum practices community technology pedagogy, facilitating ordinary people in rediscovering and validating their own capacity for becoming producers, creators, educators, and leaders, rather than relying on "experts" to pass on knowledge. Within the Digital Stewards model, collaborative media & hands-on technology education give people the opportunity to engage on their own terms. In this learning process, they use all available resources, including each other, to transform themselves, as well as to empower their own communities. We train all of our educators in our Community Technology pedagogy using the Teaching Community Technology Handbook, created in 2016 in efforts to scale the Digital Stewards program. The handbook is a collection of historical and academic educational practices that combine to create our community technology pedagogy.

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BLVD Harambee

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