

## EQUITABLE INTERNET INITIATIVE

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# Press Kit

The Equitable Internet Initiative (EII) is a collaboration between Allied Media Projects (AMP) and the Detroit Community Technology Project (DCTP) to ensure that more Detroit residents have the tools to leverage digital technologies for social and economic development.

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.

The following press kit will provide more details about EII. You may contact the EII Communications Assistant at [communitytech@alliedmedia.org](mailto:communitytech@alliedmedia.org) with additional questions.

Sincerely,

Equitable Internet Initiative

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# BACKGROUND

## 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.<sup>1</sup> In Detroit, 38% of residents live below the federal poverty level<sup>2</sup> and since 2014, tens of thousands have faced water shut-offs and evictions due to tax foreclosure, many of which could have been prevented.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 programming 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.

# PROGRAMMING

The Equitable Internet Initiative works to ensure that more Detroit residents have the ability to leverage digital technologies for social and economic development. EII consists of two key programs: Digital Stewards and Next Gen Apps. As stated, the goals of this initiative are to:

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- 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
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To achieve these goals, DCTP partnered with three anchor organizations in 2016: BLVD Harambee/Church of the Messiah, Grace in Action, and the North End Woodward Community Coalition. These three community anchor organizations each implemented EII programs in their respective neighborhoods. Grace in Action is active in the Vernor/Lawndale neighborhood in Southwest Detroit, Church of the Messiah is active in Islandview in Southeast Detroit, and WNUC Community Radio is active in Detroit's North End neighborhood.

DCTP selected these organizations based on 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 respond to rapidly changing digital opportunities and threats in Detroit.



North End Digital Stewards Heru House and Gabrielle Knox  
Photo by Jean Louis Farges of One Mile

## 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.

## EII Network Priorities

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- 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.)
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## Next Gen Apps Program

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The Next Gen Apps program is a free training in application development for the Gigabit Internet environment offered to young people in Detroit's Southwest, Islandview, and North End neighborhoods.

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The initial four-week training teaches both app development concepts and basic coding skills, such as CSS, HTML, Javascript, and Node.js.

The six-week second phase of the program provides an opportunity for six phase-one graduates from each neighborhood to work with professional technologists to build applications that help solve problems, foster collaboration, and fuel creativity within their neighborhoods. Youth who participate in this second phase earn a laptop so that they can continue to use their newfound skills to set them on a path to obtaining or creating jobs in the growing tech industry.

In Southwest Detroit, youth designed an app to support community members suffering from air pollution in their community. They designed the Truck Spot app for residents of the Southwest Detroit community, to allow residents to record and upload videos of trucks idling in violation of the City of Detroit's idling ordinance. Tracking this data will allow environmental justice organizers to get an idea of the cumulative impact of pollution on the Southwest Detroit neighborhood and its residents.

Next Gen App youth based out of Detroit's WNUC radio station are using sensors to track pollution data coming from an incinerator in their North End neighborhood, with the goal of collaborating with neighborhood organizers and partners to publicize the realities of pollution in the North End.

In Detroit's rapidly changing Islandview neighborhood, Next Gen Apps youth worked out of Church of Messiah's BLVD Harambee program to gather data and mapped out indicators of neighborhood changes, community hubs, and resources. They created a map that includes recreation centers, black-owned businesses, community resources such as food banks, and neighborhood anchor spaces. Data mapping will be used going forward to help residents create strategies to keep current neighbors in their neighborhoods, as well as to provide a platform for finding resources and engaging with their community.

# EQUITABLE INTERNET INITIATIVE WORKING PRINCIPLES

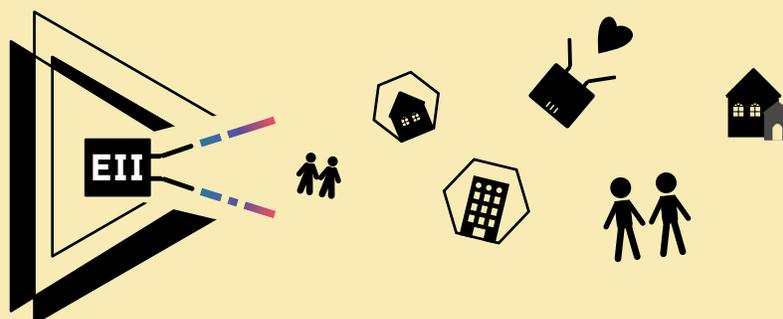
The Equitable Internet Initiative (EII) is an effort to redistribute power, resources, and connectivity in Detroit through community Internet technologies.

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.



# 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.

## 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.



Program managers and Digital Stewards Trainers with Diana Nucera (Director of DCTP) and Jenny Lee (Director of Allied Media Projects)  
Photo by DCTP



Gigabit Workshop with Mozilla Foundation  
Photo by DCTP

## 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.

# EII PARTNERS

## Grace in Action Collectives

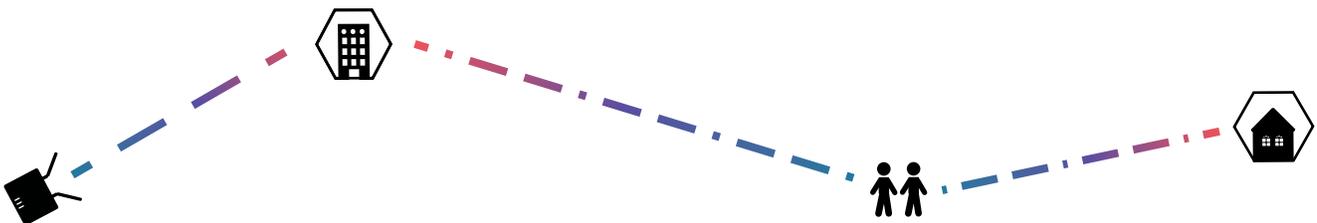
Grace in Action (GIA) Collectives is a network of youth-run and worker-owned collectives and cooperatives in Southwest Detroit. Together, they are building economic equity and ownership by sharing resources, knowledge and time while creating quality products and services. Radical Productions is a youth-run collective that works to build websites and do graphic design work for customers throughout Detroit and beyond.

## BLVD Harambee

BLVD Harambee Empowerment Center is a ministry of the Church of the Messiah, a 142-year-old non-traditional Episcopal church that focuses on needs and issues correlated with the Island View community on the east side of the Detroit. The church's primary focus is young people; the congregation is 60% African-American male under the age of thirty. The BLVD Harambee Empowerment Center was created to empower young people by equipping them with skills that inspire the entrepreneurial spirit or mindset.

## North End Woodward Community Coalition

North End Woodward Community Coalition (NEWCC) 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.



# CONTACT / SOCIAL

## **Detroit Community Technology Project**

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[detroitcommunitytech.org](http://detroitcommunitytech.org)

Instagram: [@detcommtech](https://www.instagram.com/detcommtech)

Twitter: [@DetCommTech](https://twitter.com/DetCommTech)

Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/CommunityTechnology/  
communitytech@alliedmedia.org](https://www.facebook.com/CommunityTechnology/communitytech@alliedmedia.org)

## **Grace in Action**

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[giacollectives.org](http://giacollectives.org)

Instagram: [@gia\\_detroit](https://www.instagram.com/gia_detroit)

Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/graceinactiondetroit/  
https://www.facebook.com/swdetroitelijah](https://www.facebook.com/graceinactiondetroit/)

## **North End Woodward Community Coalition**

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[www.northendwoodward.org/](http://www.northendwoodward.org/)

Instagram: [@newcceeii](https://www.instagram.com/newcceeii)

Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/NorthEndWoodward/  
internet@wnuc.org](https://www.facebook.com/NorthEndWoodward/)

## **BLVD Harambee**

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[churchofthemessiahdetroit.org/blvd-harambee/](http://churchofthemessiahdetroit.org/blvd-harambee/)

Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/Boulevard-Harambee-728204810567238/  
eiiiinfo@blvdharambee.org](https://www.facebook.com/Boulevard-Harambee-728204810567238/)

Photos and logos from EII are [available on Google Drive.](#)