

## Libraries Strengthening Community Grant Application Questions

### **Which specific users/user groups will the project serve? What are their biggest digital needs? (500 word limit)**

A major focus of this project will be teaching seniors to efficiently use digital devices to meet their needs. From conversations with library event programmers and front of house staff across the system, we determined seniors' biggest digital needs to be computer basics. These basics include not only browsing the internet, identifying scams, and using Microsoft Office software, but also guidance on how to operate a computer like powering the device off and on, how to use a computer mouse, and how to type. Other skills like the basics of organizing files and accessing the library's digital resources are also areas in which this grant will enable library staff to transfer knowledge to seniors.

This project will also serve Spanish speakers and other individuals who do not speak English. While their digital needs vary greatly, individuals in this group tend to need assistance navigating school software for their children and with internet basics. By working closely with partners like the Kramden Institute who already offer Spanish-language computer classes at Main Library, Stanford L. Warren Branch Library, and East Regional Library, this project will empower Durham County Library to further expand its digital literacy program to Spanish speakers.

This project will emphasize service to individuals who are re-entering the workforce. Their biggest digital needs are around building resumes, searching for jobs on platforms like LinkedIn and Indeed, and familiarity with daily technology use in the workplace. By offering additional programming laptops and working with our Small Business Center staff, this grant will make digital literacy programming more accessible to job seeking individuals.

Children, tweens, and teens will also be served by this project. Their biggest digital needs are researching responsibly, finding and using reputable sources of information, 3D printing and design, and using cloud-based software for document sharing. As part of this project, we will also serve the homeschool population. In addition to the needs of other young people, our event programmers highlighted that homeschoolers are often behind their formally schooled peers when it comes to technology. Some of these homeschoolers need to upskill quickly if they transition to formal schooling.

Finally, this project will serve individuals who experience Durham's digital divide. Durham's neighboring counties, Wake and Orange, outperform Durham on several digital divide metrics. While only 78.01% of Durham County's residents have a broadband subscription at home, Wake County measures 84.52% and Orange County measures 79.22%. Those without internet access in the home represent 7.14% of Durham's population, whereas only 4.48% and 4.81% of Wake and Orange County residents, respectively, go without internet at home. Durham also has a higher percentage of individuals who do not own a computer at 4.86%, with Wake and Orange Counties measuring only 2.78% and 3.89%, respectively (NC OneMap, North Carolina Division

of Broadband and Digital Opportunity). By providing easier access to high-quality devices, this grant will continue to build Durham County Library's mission of bridging the digital divide.

**What is your library staff's experience serving this/these populations? (500 word limit)**

Serving populations who are seeking to develop their digital literacy skills is a major aspect of Durham County Library staff's experience. Indeed, by making strategic use of internal programming funds, grant support from Library Family partners like the Durham Library Foundation and the Friends of the Durham Library, and previously awarded grants from the State Library, addressing the digital divide and the crisis of digital literacy has become part of Durham County Library's core mission.

For FY26, the Durham Library Foundation provided funds that will replace the aging 3D printers in Main Library's Innovation Lab and create a multimedia production studio at South Regional Library. In FY25, grants from the Friends of the Durham Library funded one program that incorporated digital literacy into arts programming and another that purchased high-powered laptops to run the powerful software necessary for our Maker + STEAM unit's newly acquired 3D scanners. In FY24, the Friends funded a project that made Maker + STEAM kits available for checkout and a presentation system for digital literacy classes at South Regional Library.

In addition to these grants from our Library Family Partners, Durham County Library has demonstrated success with delivering digital literacy initiatives with the support of grant funds from the State Library. During the fiscal year ending in June 2025, our Maker + STEAM unit was awarded a LSTA EZ grant that supported the expansion of the unit's technology offerings to include 3D scanners and an updated laser cutter while also enabling the extension of the unit's outreach capacities. Digital and technological literacy was also a core objective of the two-year LSTA project grant for Teaching Technology: The Cutting Edge Made Mobile. From 2022-2024, this project purchased technology and developed curricula in partnership with Durham Public schools. This necessary technology infrastructure enabled library programmers to serve school-age children in addition to seniors and parents.

Prior to the pandemic, the State Library awarded Durham County Library a grant to expand its reservation appointment system for digital navigation. By partnering with Digital Durham and North Carolina State University's Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, Durham County Library guided patrons through acquiring basic technology and acquiring the skills needed to use that technology independently. Moreover, this grant also resulted in training materials that empowered library staff to continue digital navigation initiatives after the period of the grant. Main Library patrons now have access to a point of contact who provides attentive one-on-one digital navigation sessions to anyone who needs access to help with technology.

**Provide a detailed description of all major project activities. (750 word limit)**

With the support of these grant funds, Durham County Library will purchase 70 programming laptops to be distributed around its seven locations. The distribution will see each of Durham

County Library's seven brick-and-mortar locations receive ten laptops. These laptops will facilitate and expand Durham County Library's array of digital literacy programs and trainings. Among the small number of existing programming laptops, only a small handful are fully functional and in regular use.

Durham County Library is a crucial hub in the Durham community for digital access, primarily through the provision of public computers. In the last fiscal year alone, Durham County Library provided over 90,000 public computer sessions. These public desktop computers, however, are located in the public areas of the library, making it difficult to utilize them in a programming setting. Most Durham County Library locations have a small number of laptops.

Overwhelmingly, Durham County Library's supply of programming laptops is frustratingly slow and will not update to Windows 11 software in line with the rest of Durham County's public and staff devices.

This fact severely limits the amount of hands-on instruction the library's programming staff can carry out. Some library staff report requesting the potential attendees of their digital literacy programs to bring their own devices, which can act as a barrier to entry particularly for lower-income residents of Durham. While working with partners like the Kramden Institute, who provide low-cost devices to means-tested applicants, can help to lower that barrier, having readily available laptops for use by digital literacy program attendees will remove the barrier altogether.

With these 70 programming laptops, Durham County Library programming staff across seven locations will expand upon their existing digital literacy initiatives. Among others, that will encompass programs like East Regional Library's computer basics classes that teach attendees how to physically operate the controls of a computer, access and responsibly surf the web, and become familiar with the fundamentals of Microsoft Word and Excel. It will include North Regional Library's classes for tweens and teens on how to research responsibly. Our Maker + STEAM unit's 3D printing and laser cutting offerings will also benefit from this grant.

In addition to expanding our existing program offerings, having access to a larger number of programming laptops will enable Durham County Library event programmers to do more. For example, the Maker + STEAM unit envisions using these programming laptops to run programs in CAD design. With many units of government encouraging citizens to go paper-free, Main Library staff see using these laptops to offer programs on navigating benefits websites and using a computer to fill out forms. Stanford L. Warren Branch library staff foresee programs on touch typing and citing sources with common formats.

The timeline for the project will begin with gaining approval from the Durham County Board of Commissioners. This process includes both a work session and a regular session of Board meetings. Upon notification of a successful application, we will submit the details of the grant for inclusion on a work session agenda. The deadlines for inclusion on the last Commissioner meetings of 2025 have passed, and those for 2026 have yet to be announced, but the grant will

submitted for approval immediately upon the start Durham County's process. Following the project's approval by the Commissioners, the laptops will be purchased in late January or early February. Alongside this process, the project lead will set up documentation and recording procedures in line with State Library and Durham County Library requirements, collaborating with other library staff to conduct staff training, and prepare for the delivery of the devices. March through June will see the laptops rolled out to the public through a wide array of digital literacy programs. After this, the project lead will submit the final reimbursement request and the final report prior to the State Library's deadline.

As part of the application preparation process, library staff partnered with Durham County IT to ensure the purchase of these laptops during the grant coincides with the County's cyclical device replacement process. Therefore, following the period of the grant, these programming laptops will be replaced by Durham County at after the standard three-year replacement cycle.

**Describe in detail how the project activities will advance digital literacy. (500 word limit)**

The American Library Association's Digital Literacy Task Force defines digital literacy as the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. People with these skills can use diverse technologies to engage in lifelong learning and actively participate in civil society. In support of that mission, this project will advance digital literacy by embedding additional technological resources in a library system that has a long history of tech-focused programming.

In enabling the expansion of digital literacy programs to an even wider array of users and skill levels, this project will advance digital literacy through library programmers' knowledge of the needs of the community. Identified programming needs include assistance with workplace readiness, basic research and citation practices, creative endeavors using makerspace technology, and using a variety of software. Addressing these needs with the technology infrastructure provided by this grant will bridge the digital divide and advance digital literacy.

By facilitating programs on computer basics, this project will invite patrons with the greatest digital literacy needs to improve their skills. Patrons will also acquire necessary workplace skills with classes on Microsoft Word and Excel, resume preparation, and file organization. Programs on 3D printing and laser cutter will pair digital literacy with creativity while inspiring lifelong learning. Tweens and teens will learn vital research and citation skills while new computer users will learn how to identify scams. Ultimately, these laptops will be the foundation for an expansion of programming that will empower Durham County Library patrons to more fully partake in our society with their digital literacy skills.

**Describe how the project will continue growth in digital skills for library staff. (500 word limit)**

With this project, library staff will continue their growth in digital skills by their exposure to the issues Durham County Library patrons bring forward. Staff will learn by teaching these crucial skills to library patrons. In addition, library staff will work closely with the library's designated Training Coordinator, who routinely shares resources and provides training on digital skills, customer service, and dealing with patron challenges. By encountering new problems while teaching crucial digital skills to patrons, library staff will continually develop their own digital skills.

**Describe your library staff's experience in working in digital literacy and/or how will you build your experience? (500 word limit)**

As it stands, Durham County Library offers hundreds of digital literacy and technology focused programs each year, serving thousands of patrons in the process. Just some examples of digital literacy programs from the last calendar year are a drop-in session for using social media for a small business, a partnership with UNC Chapel Hill's Community Workshop Series on computer basics, a Python programming class for teens, and sessions on how to access Durham County Library's e-book and e-audiobook collections.

In addition, the over 90,000 public computer sessions provided by the library in the last fiscal year proved to be a primary point of contact between library staff and patrons in need of assistance with digital literacy. Helping patrons navigate printing and scanning, reset account passwords, troubleshoot Microsoft and cloud-based word processing software, and find accurate search results are just some of the everyday digital skills with which frontline library staff assist Durham County Library patrons. These interactions also form the basis for these library staff members' desire to meet patrons' needs by expanding their digital literacy program offerings.

Furthermore, Durham County Library's long history of acquiring grant funds to support digital literacy initiatives had added to library staff's experience of working in digital literacy. In addition to multiple grants from the State Library, Durham County Library staff have experience with acquiring and managing grants from the Friends of the Durham Library and the Durham Library Foundation.

Regarding building experience in the future, Durham County Library has a strong culture of internal collaboration. Having a dedicated Maker + STEAM unit means there are staff whose job it is to stay up to date on emerging technologies. These staff, in turn, train other staff in new technologies, leading to a high level of digital literacy for library staff.

**Include a list of partners in the project and describe their role(s). (500 word limit)**

Partners in this project will include Durham County Library's existing digital literacy partners like the Kramden Institute and UNC Chapel Hill's Community Workshop Series. Both of these partners provide direct instruction to library patrons, with Kramden instructors doing so in both English and Spanish. Kramden also works to get patrons in the approval pipeline for their own low-cost devices and access to reduced-cost broadband in the home.

**Select 2-3 outcomes that align with your project.**

- Library staff will identify, navigate, and successfully interact with digital technology*
- Library staff will be confident in their ability to navigate and interact with digital technology and users*
- Library staff will transfer knowledge and skills learned during training to real digital problems*
- Library staff will identify digital navigation and support resources in the community and refer individuals to those resources*
- Library Staff will recognize the value of their work toward meeting the digital needs of the individuals, especially those in the focus populations*
- Users will identify, navigate, and successfully interact with digital technology*
- Users be confident in their ability to navigate and interact with digital technology.*
- Users will access available library digital resources*
- Users will be confident and welcome in public library spaces*

**How will you assess baseline metrics and outcomes? (500 word limit)**

As part of this grant, Durham County Library will closely monitor the usage statistics for programming laptops. In addition, library staff will record and monitor the attendance of digital literacy-focused programming. For each program that uses these programming laptops, patrons will be surveyed on their confidence in their ability to navigate and interact with digital technology and access available library resources.