



MID-YEAR IMPACT REPORT

Q3 | Q4 - 2023



THE CENTER FOR DIGITAL EQUITY is a collaboration
of public, private, and resident partners
housed at Queens University of Charlotte

QUEENS
UNIVERSITY
of
CHARLOTTE



Laptop Distribution Event
Barings, E2D, CDE



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Introduction

Today, essential daily activities are primarily digital: Work, learning, healthcare, community connection, news/information sources, banking, government programs, job searches...the list goes on. Those who have sub-par access to digital resources are at an acute disadvantage to contribute fully, whether economically and civically.

The Center for Digital Equity (CDE) is the backbone organization for a collective impact strategy, bringing together residents, public, and private sector partners to co-create solutions allowing every resident the opportunity to thrive in our modern culture.

This report aims to give a snapshot of the CDE's activities at this midpoint in our year so that we can be fully transparent to our partners, funding agencies, and the community at large. It is meant to be a continuation of the work as illustrated/ outlined in the June 2023 Collective Impact Report, which can be found here for reference: <https://thecenterfordigitalequity.org/collective-impact-report>.

All CDE activities are broken into five workstreams, each of which has its own objectives and key results (OKRs).



de Comunicaciones



le los programas,

Policy, Advocacy, and Ecosystem Development

OKR Produce a collective vision with a Policy and Advocacy agenda through a participatory and collective process.

SEVEN
LISTENING
SESSIONS

80
PARTICIPANTS

IMPACT FOCUS

Dana Draa

One Digital Equity Champion is Dana A. Draa, Network Director-Metrolina at Veterans Bridge Home and formerly Metrolina Association for the Blind's Chief Program Officer. Having worked closely with veterans and individuals living with disabilities, Dana personally witnessed the challenges they faced when trying to access digital content and services (and other services, too).

[Read more about Draa's story, and how she came to partner with the CDE.](#)



PAST

PREVIOUS PROGRESS In the 2022/2023 fiscal year, the first workstream created a general policy agenda that marked the beginning of the coordinated community approach. At the end of that fiscal year, they initiated a stipend-based process to engage the covered populations in listening sessions. That work began in the 2024 fiscal year.

PRESENT

CURRENT PROGRESS Eight organizations were chosen to deepen our relationships in neighborhoods and in populations least served. These were incentivized to bring forth community members to participate in seven listening sessions, with a total of 80 people participating. Sessions were facilitated by a consultant who subsequently compiled the feedback and created our policy agenda, which we unveiled at our November Community Council meeting. A main reason for adopting this approach is to create a process that is sustainable from year to year, yet also flexible and scalable.

We also recruited eight people, one per partner organization, to be Digital Equity Champions. These individuals participated in a total of 10 training sessions, covering the goals and objectives of the CDE as well as training in community-based leadership.

FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD We will continue to move forward tying our policy agenda to local research, connecting the dots of the digital divide to economic, health, and educational outcomes.



Digital Equity Champion
Dana A. Draa, Network Director,
Metrolina at Veterans Bridge Home

Data, Program Measurement, and Research

OKR Continue development of a data dashboard to provide the community with a snapshot of ongoing digital equity work in Mecklenburg County.

PAST

PREVIOUS PROGRESS Worked with city of Charlotte to create an Arc GIS story map showing community needs with regard to Digital Equity.

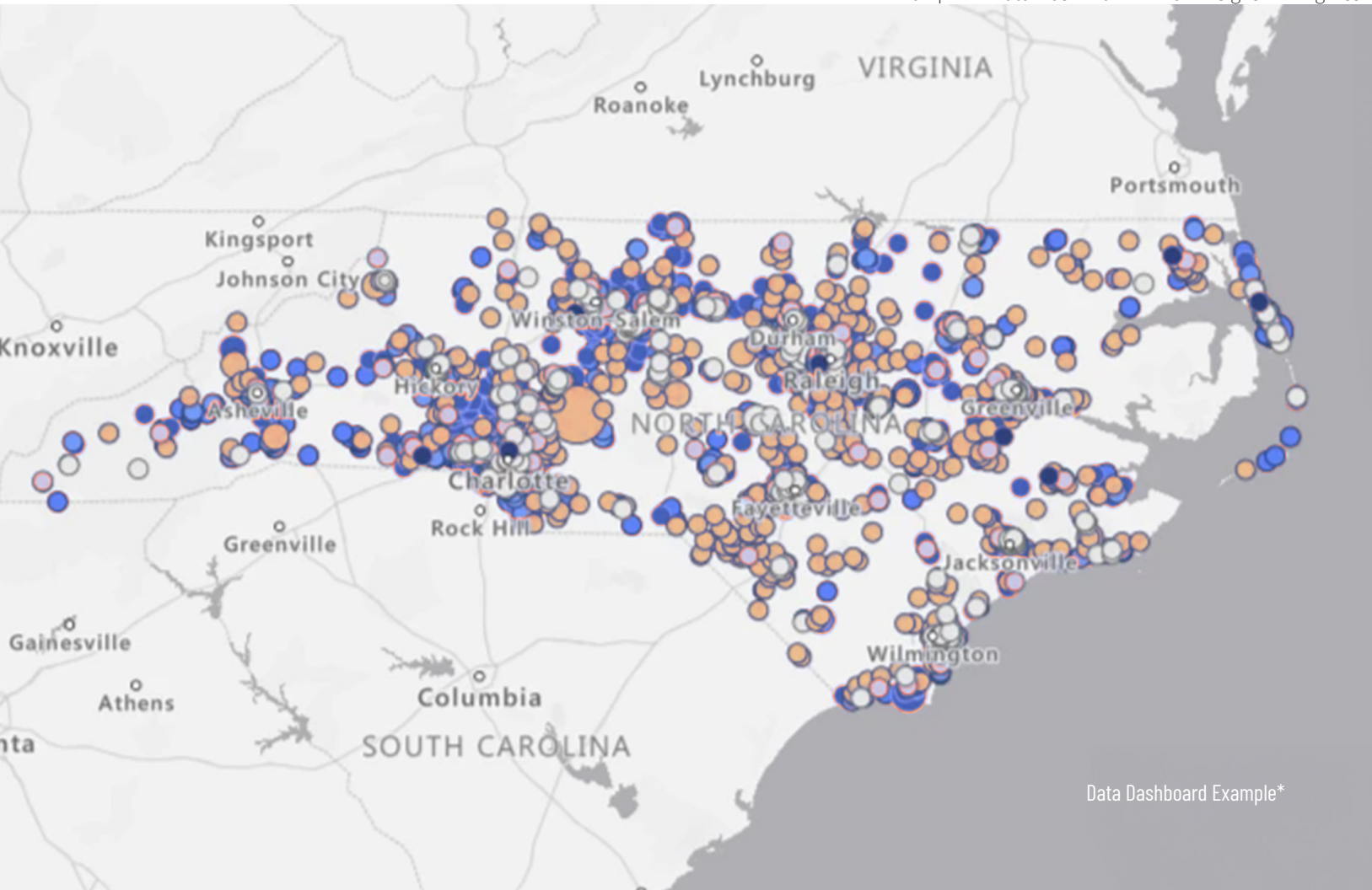
PRESENT

CURRENT PROGRESS We contracted with a consultant to create a data dashboard, tying in data from three partner organizations: Per Scholas (which provides tuition-free IT education), Eliminate the Digital Divide (E2D), and the Mecklenburg County library system. These organizations now share detailed information about device distribution, classes held, and so on. The pilot dashboard can now show, by location, where services are happening and overlay that information with where needs have been identified. This dashboard not only will help with coordinating the activities of existing and future partners, but also help ensure that the various efforts are going to the areas that need them most.

FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD Finalizing dashboard design and scaling out the process in order to integrate the rest of our partners in the ecosystem.

* Example of Data Dashboard - Final Designs in Progress.



OKR Update the library of digital-equity resources, data summaries, and process of data analytics for a centralized view of information.

IMPACT FOCUS

Digital Equity Assets List

The [working list of digital equity assets can be found here](#), and at NCDIT's [Digital Equity Resources page](#).

PAST

PREVIOUS PROGRESS Identified the need for additional Mecklenburg County asset mapping and digital literacy resources.

PRESENT

CURRENT PROGRESS There exists a clear need for a centralized repository for local digital equity research efforts, including a glossary with standard definitions to facilitate partnerships. Upon discovering that a state agency was involved in a similar project, we decided that, rather than duplicating efforts, we would support the state in rolling out this asset. Our Digital Navigators helped by completing the state's asset inventory forms and identifying resources. The state, in turn, is sharing the information gathered as it becomes available.

FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD Continue to support the State's efforts and make use of the asset inventory. Additionally, we will expand our resource compilation in Mecklenburg County and produce a localized version to benefit and measure growing resources.



Staff Development Day
CDE

OKR Create an on-demand supply of no-cost/low-cost devices for qualifying residents to increase the connectivity rate across Mecklenburg County.

700
LAPTOPS
DISTRIBUTED SO FAR

ANOTHER
1,300
TO DISTRIBUTE IN THE
SECOND HALF OF THE YEAR

PAST

PREVIOUS PROGRESS Requested funding for no-cost/low-cost devices.

PRESENT

CURRENT PROGRESS To make progress with this OKR, we partnered closely with Eliminate the Digital Divide (E2D), one of the most active and innovative digital inclusion supporters and device refurbisher in the State. Together with E2D, we arranged for quarterly laptop distributions and secured funding to distribute 2000 no-cost laptop devices. So far, almost 700 no-cost devices (out of the one thousand devices available for the first two quarters) have been distributed or committed. In conjunction with these events, we also created a request system to gauge device demand and ensure that our distribution was meeting community needs.

We also had several requests not from individuals, but from other community organizations looking to help distribute devices. We thus made sure that the request system could capture the needs here, too, and support other organizations. As these organizations helped distribute devices, we asked that they share their data so that it could be funneled back to our main dashboard; this allows us to see more clearly where the greatest needs are, where devices are being distributed, and which areas still need to be served.

Finally, we used device distribution events and partners as a springboard for asking about other aspects of digital inclusion, such as connectivity and digital skills. For example, when distributing laptops at the quarterly events, we asked those receiving them key questions:

- Do you have questions about how this device works?
- Now that you have a device, would you be interested in any classes to learn how to use it better?
- Are there other resources we can connect you with so you can use this device successfully?

The goal here was to take a more holistic view of connectivity that went beyond simply having an affordable device. We also brought this approach to other community organizations as well.

FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD Going forward, we plan to get up and running a program for no-cost/low-cost device repair and service. Given the current progress on the device distribution initiative; we are on track to partially meet the goal of distributing 20,000 laptops by the end of the year by approximately 25%.

OKR Develop local mechanisms and funding that support the most vulnerable (nine covered populations) in maintaining their internet service.

PAST

PREVIOUS PROGRESS Won a contract with the City of Charlotte to continue our Digital Navigator service to help bridge the digital divide.

PRESENT

CURRENT PROGRESS In 2022, The Federal Communications Commission created “Your Home, Your Internet,” (YHYI) a pilot program designed to increase awareness and encourage participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) for households receiving federal housing assistance. In collaboration with Inlivan, the housing authority in Charlotte, we applied for a grant through this program and won.

The purpose of this partnership is to increase awareness of and encourage participation in the Affordable Connectivity Program for households receiving federal housing assistance. To have the greatest impact on increasing ACP adoption and ensure every qualifying resident has access to in-person sign-up support, an ecosystem of awareness-building and enrollment support must be created. This led to a collaboration between the CDE and INLIVIAN, with the goal of increasing ACP adoption, fusing a multifaceted and interconnected approach with INLIVIAN PHA and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) residents. To achieve this, CDE has been working to implement the following strategies: 1) utilize trusted digital navigators (DNs) to spread awareness of and support in ACP enrollment, 2) leverage media and marketing campaigns to drive ACP adoption, 3) maximize the use of in-person events and 4) track and conduct follow-up to ensure successful ACP enrollment.

(Continued pg 8)

IMPACT FOCUS

Erin Royal

The reach of these programs, and the institutions supporting them, cannot be understated. One person with a clear understanding of this impact is Erin Royal, EducationSuperHighway’s Program Manager. She recognizes that “we are connecting two really powerful and huge institutions in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County that just have an incredible reach...and from that, it’s also generating word of mouth. So it’s not just going to affect the people living in INLIVIAN properties who receive Section 8 vouchers; they’re going to let their family, friends, and neighbors know.” [Learn more from Erin Royal’s, and the YHYI program generally.](#)



Erin Royal, Program Manager
EducationSuperHighway

Device and Connectivity (cont.)

OKR Develop local mechanisms and funding that support the most vulnerable (nine covered populations) in maintaining their internet service.

(Continued from pg 7)

4,400
HOUSEHOLDS
CONNECTED TO
HIGH SPEED
INTERNET

Digital Literacy and Skilling

OKR Publish version 1 of the Journey Map to reduce barriers in accessing digital resources.

PRESENT

Additionally, through collaboration with the city and with the goal of connecting at least 10,000 households, we've helped expand the Access Charlotte program, which was started to help put free Wi-Fi in public areas closest to those communities in need. With the expansion, Access Charlotte began focusing on in-home connectivity and aiding community members with their new home internet service. In both endeavors, we acted as a liaison between the community, the City, and the ISP providing the internet service. To date through this collaboration, we've been able to connect approximately 4,400 households to high speed internet.

Today, 2,416 in-property INLIVIAN households have received direct marketing materials to increase their awareness of the ACP benefit. This has included door hangers on their units, flyers and postcards in their buildings, as well as enrollment events hosted at their properties. Additionally, all 5,000 Housing Choice Voucher households have received two mailers, one in English and Spanish, to both increase awareness and make the ACP application more accessible. Our live events, plus the efforts of our digital navigators and partners, have not only reached many in our target communities, but have also started to create word-of-mouth buzz around the program.

FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD We will continue our partnerships with the city and with Inlivan. We also plan to create a road map that details how we are going to assist those that may be at risk of losing their Internet in the event ACP funding is no longer available.

PAST

PREVIOUS PROGRESS Began cementing relationships with partner organizations to begin work on the Journey Map.

PRESENT

CURRENT PROGRESS The goal in developing the journey map is to provide community members at different life stages and experience levels the ability to find and leverage available resources. For example, a younger person who can no longer afford college might still be interested in learning how to code in order to stay competitive in the job market. The Journey Map will outline resources available for doing so in an engaging and resource-rich way. This is why the localized version of digital assets will continue to be a focus area for CDE.

We have worked to develop this Journey Map with partner programs such as Per Scholas, Barings, and the library system, and expect the first iteration of this journey map to be published in the spring of 2024.

FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD We are working with a developer to see how AI can be used to further enhance the user experience.

OKR Develop and maintain relationships with partners to support the facilitation of place-based digital skilling services for the most vulnerable (covered populations).

IMPACT FOCUS
Train the trainer

The following organizations are already doing digital literacy programs with us:

Camino	Latino population <i>(especially people with language barriers)</i>
Latin American Coalition	Latino population <i>(especially people with language barriers)</i>
Charlotte Rescue Mission	Previously incarcerated individuals, Veterans, Individuals who live in covered households, Aging individuals
Harris YMCA	Aging individuals, Individuals with disabilities, Veterans, Youth
Beatties Ford Vocational Trade Center	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals who live in covered households, Youth
First Mt. Calvary Baptist Church	Individuals with disabilities, Veterans, Youth, Individuals who live in covered households, Previously incarcerated individuals

The following organizations received laptops through the partnership with E2D:

First In Families	Individuals with disabilities, Youth
The Center for Community Transitions	Previously incarcerated individuals <i>(other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility)</i>
Catholic Charities Diocese of Charlotte	Immigrants, Individuals with a language barrier, Youth, Veterans

PAST
PRESENT
FUTURE

PREVIOUS PROGRESS Identified several covered populations to connect with, including racial and ethnic minorities, people with language barriers, low income families, aging individuals, and persons with disabilities.

CURRENT PROGRESS We partnered with the local library system and AARP to launch a program called Tech Titans 50+. Through the library system, seniors were offered digital literacy sessions along two different pathways (laptop/computer basics and tablet basics), using a Learning Management System (LMS) called Senior Planet. AARP helped with advertising and awareness through radio ads and direct mail postcards. Over 100 people showed interest in the program by coming to a listening session, and both pathways filled up immediately. The first cohort just finished the program, meaning that roughly 50 people benefited from the offering. The program proved to be so popular that it is being repeated in the spring.

In total, we had a goal of facilitating at least 2500 hours of digital skills training for our most vulnerable populations. Between Tech Titans 50+ and other programs, as well as our partnership with Per Scholas and our “Train the trainer” model, the CDE and partners have facilitated 16,064 digital literacy training hours—nearly 6.5x our goal.

MOVING FORWARD We aim to facilitate similar partnerships and programs in the future for other covered populations using our “Train the Trainer” model.

The Accelerated Training Program (T-ATP)	Youth, Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
Freedom Fighting Missionaries	Previously incarcerated individuals, Veterans, Aging individuals
Trades Tech	Individuals with disabilities, Previously incarcerated individuals, Youth
CLTRising	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, Youth
Harmony Health Therapeutic Services	Youth, Veterans, Previously incarcerated individuals, Individuals with disabilities, Aging individuals
Marizetta Kerry Child Development Center	Individuals who live in covered households, Youth
A Brighter Day Outreach	Aging individuals, Previously incarcerated individuals, Youth, Veterans, Individuals with disabilities
Roof Above	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Previously incarcerated individuals, Veterans
Avian Robotics	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, Youth
Emmaus	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic
Freedom Communities	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals who live in covered households



Digital Navigation and Technical Support

OKR Achieve high service quality for the most frequent inquiry types and community member backgrounds.

In general, we have seen an increased demand for our Digital Navigator services:

	PREVIOUS YEAR 2022	PREVIOUS SIX MONTHS July 22 - Dec 22	MOST RECENT SIX MONTHS As of 12/31/2023
Ticket Volume	3,050	991	1,812
Sign ups for affordable home broadband	1,958	796	944
Purchasing affordable technology	726	204	573
Basic device and connectivity issues	380	166	157
Learning new digital skills	216	97	292
Other	25	3	36
Calls made	23,400	1,071	16,405

(Note: Residents can select multiple services in one support ticket. Thus, the number of service types requested will not equal the total number of tickets.)

OKR Develop a regular schedule and host in-person “DN hour” events to ensure we are reaching the most vulnerable (all covered populations).

PAST

PREVIOUS PROGRESS Recruit and train five part-time digital navigators.

PRESENT

CURRENT PROGRESS We have conducted 120 events (an average of 20 events each month) reaching covered populations. These events include initiative-specific outreach through Access Charlotte and Inlivan, as well as device distribution, digital skilling, and partner program events.

FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD Continue to support events and outreach, both for planned events and forthcoming ones (such as the library system’s mobile bus). Note - the continued training and development of Digital Navigators will be a high priority for CDE as they serve a broad array of residents with diverse learning needs.

See our upcoming events - <https://thecenterfordigitalequity.org/calendar/>

Internal OKRs

Over the past year, the CDE had considerable focus on recruitment and on boarding of both staff and community council members, as well as developing and documenting critical processes. This process led to the creation of FY2024 Internal OKRs to further define our objectives needed to grow and sustain programs.

OBJECTIVE 1 Develop an organizational structure that supports upward succession and personal development.

OBJECTIVE 2 Increase capacity of internal resources to expand on the number of events and initiatives supported by CDE.

OBJECTIVE 3 Develop a funding strategy for CDE sustainability.

OBJECTIVE 4 Integrate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) into organizational structure as evidenced by it being reflected in policies, practice and procedures as defined by strategic DEI planning.

KEY RESULTS

Create a first iteration succession ladder with specific job descriptions and role requirements/skills.

Develop and implement an independent development plan for each employee.

Hire and on board a full-time Digital Navigator program manager/director.

KEY RESULTS

Add at least one operations position to support event and administrative functions.

Add at least one operations position to support finance/data functions.

Add at least one operations position to support marketing and communications.

Add at least two graduate assistants (GAs) for each Program Director to support data collection and project management processes

Identify and document all processes to create a repository of workflow charts that any employee can leverage regardless of role.

Identify at least one process without a documented procedure and create one.

Identify a sustainable workspace to support the growing team
Work with a consultant to identify needs and develop strategy.

KEY RESULTS

Create a roadmap to implement the strategy.

Apply for additional grant funding from IJJA.

KEY RESULTS

Conduct an organization-wide diversity, equity and inclusion audit.

Promote learning and development to up skill on cultural competency and equity.

Implement equity lens across organization.

Collect and use demographic data to support DEI efforts for covered populations as defined in the Digital Equity Act.

We are grateful to our partners and funding agencies for making progress toward these OKRs possible, and for continuing to support us as we grow the CDE and its people.

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At A Glance



Policy, Advocacy, and Ecosystem Development

SEVEN
LISTENING
SESSIONS

80
PARTICIPANTS



Device and Connectivity

700
LAPTOPS
DISTRIBUTED SO FAR

**ANOTHER
1,300**
TO DISTRIBUTE IN THE
SECOND HALF OF THE YEAR



Digital Literacy and Skilling

FACILITATED
16,064
DIGITAL
LITERACY
TRAINING HOURS

NEARLY
6.5x
OUR GOAL



Digital Navigation and Technical Support

120
EVENTS
REACHING COVERED
POPULATIONS

AVERAGING
20
EVENTS
EACH MONTH