

Community Partners + Intensive Navigation + Digital Literacy = Post Secondary Credentialing

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Why are the partner organizations that are or will be included in this work the ones that came together to address educational attainment through place-based work in your region?

Since the inception of COVID, SJI has been working with community partners to address digital equity issues including access to devices, reliable internet connectivity, and the skills needed by both job seekers and learners. SJI seeks to build on these existing and long-standing partnerships to continue to address basic digital needs but also to add intermediate digital skills that are a pre-requisite for success in most post-secondary programs.

Although partners are not formally written into our application, partners are a pivotal part of our work with over 30 memorandums of understanding in place. As such, partners are a key component of this proposal. Our Digital Bridge work will focus on using our extensive network of nearly 30 partners, across 2 counties, who already provide a variety of services to the target populations most connected with lower high school completion rates and a lack of post-secondary credentialing (immigrants, migrants, low income individuals, housing unstable young adults, minorities (African American, Hispanic, Native American, etc.). Highlighted partners include:

- **United Indians of All Tribes**, Kolbi Monasmith, Program Manager, Native Workforce Services Program
- **Latino Civic Alliance**, Marie Bravo, Resource Development and Program Director
- **Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle**, DJ Black, Lead Job Developer
- **Cocoon House**, Susan Gustafson, Director of Employment/Director of SnoCo Connect
- **Housing Hope**, Erin Matthews, Director of Employment, Education & Training
- **Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest**, Van Kuno, Executive Director

By leveraging our partnerships, and using partners as trusted messengers, our career navigators can easily make connections with prospective participants. Additionally, we can provide supportive services for those already enrolled in training to encourage program completion or provide support services, career navigation, and training for those yet engaged in a post-secondary program.

Through an intensive intake process we can discern immediate needs/barriers and document long-term goals; we view these as the prerequisite steps in charting education and career training pathways. With the necessary supports in place and pathways created, these plans will map out for participants the applicable credentials (pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships) and/or Microcredentials (digital literacy, etc).

Partner	Focus	Partner	Focus
Chief Seattle Club	American Indian and Alaska Native people	Partners in Employment	refugee and immigrant Employment
Cocoon House (S)	young adult housing instability	Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest (S)	newly arrived refugees and immigrants
Computing For All	young adults of all races, genders, and abilities	Refugee Empowerment Hub (S)	refugees and immigrants
Community Passageways	justice impacted youth and young adults	Refugee Women’s Alliance (ReWA)	refugee and immigrant women and families
Congolese Integration Network	Congolese immigrants and refugees	Seattle Housing Authority	housing and supportive services for people with low incomes
Housing Hope (S)	homelessness and poverty reduction	Seattle Public Library	community hub with 27 locations

International Rescue Committee	refugees, asylees, victims of human trafficking, survivors of torture, and other immigrants	Sphere Solar Energy	clean energy training
Kabul Washington association	Afghan immigrants	United Indians of All Tribes Foundation	urban Native community
Latino Civic Alliance	communities of color	Uplift Northwest	temporary staffing operation
Machinist Institute	automotive, manufacturing and machinist training	Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle	African Americans, as well as other diverse underserved communities
Muslim Community Resource Center	the less fortunate	Utopia Washington	queer and trans people of color
Pacific Associate	equal opportunity program	S=Snohomish County	

Established College Partnerships	
Snohomish	King
Everett	Renton Technical
Edmonds	Shoreline
Bellevue	North Seattle
Green River	Seattle Central
Highline	South Seattle

How is or will the partnership be structured?

We are a long-standing workforce intermediary nonprofit with 25+ years of experience. Our original focus on the Seattle/King County area has expanded north and south along the I-5 corridor. Our partnerships are well-established and continue to grow. Our aim is to work with the partners who serve priority populations, those with the lowest graduation/post-secondary credential attainment rates. We will also work with anyone who has the desire to earn a credential which can launch a new career in a more stable employment sector.

We facilitate every partner meeting to ensure all partner organizations are engaged. Additionally, we will follow-up individually with all partners as well as email meeting minutes to ensure clarity. Lastly, our Communications Specialist will work with organizations on appropriate flyer content and/or translations to ensure understanding.

Some of the partners listed previously are recipients of other funding (DOL, Good Jobs Challenge) that have agreed to leverage these funds which will increase our reach and sustainability.

How have or will the partner organizations learn from each other, and the communities served, and how does or will the partnership incorporate this learning into ongoing work?

We have regular meetings with our partners as an already established practice. For this funding, we will hold a kickoff meeting with all partners and continue to meet quarterly for each new cohort. We will use these meetings to promote the new opportunity to ensure outreach covers the unique communities they serve. From previous work we know some organizations have greater success at enrolling participants.

We will use meetings to share their lessons learned and best practices to help younger organizations achieve greater impact.

Who are the focal population(s) in your partnership’s work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journeys?

As noted in our partner chart, the primary populations in our work are those who have the lowest graduation and post-secondary credential rates (immigrants, migrants, low income individuals, housing unstable young adults, minority ethnicities (African American, Hispanic, Native American, WIOA youth/young adults, etc.). Regardless of the group, assets include the desire to better their lives, the lives of their children, and future generations. “Ganas” is the Spanish word for desire; it is much more than that though. It’s an internal drive to achieve and succeed. Many of the noted populations have the desire to succeed (earn a credential) but have yet to connect with the opportunity and support needed to start them on their pathway. With intensive outreach, intake, and navigation, we can foster relationships to help make those connections.

What is the geographic region where the focal population(s) that would be served by this investment live?

Using our established reach along the I-5 corridor, our work will focus on King and Snohomish Counties. King will have a more urban focus and our work in the Snohomish area will include more rural areas; those literally furthest removed from opportunities.

What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families in your focal population(s) encounter?

Digital inequities present a barrier to post-secondary credential attainment for adult learners, especially those from underinvested communities. Those without a post-secondary credential often work multiple, part-time, survival jobs. With fluctuating schedules, attending training on a consistent basis until completion is a monumental barrier. Enrolling in training and not working is typically a nonnegotiable obstacle. A misconceived barrier is the cost of earning a post-secondary credential. Washington offers more need-based financial aid (\$2,008.23 per FTE in 2021-22) to undergraduate students than any other state in the country (The Columbian 2.2024).

A lack of reliable transportation is another common impediment. Another major deterrent is a lack of a knowledgeable guide on the side who is consistently available and has the expertise to help participants connect the dots (reduce or eliminate barriers) and build a pathway they want to pursue. Lastly, an inviting, easy to navigate, user-friendly environment is paramount.

A one-stop shop can provide digital literacy instruction, wraparound support services, and training connections that will facilitate future program enrollments and credentialing. Additionally, the relationships made can continue until participants achieve credentialing completion. Smaller organizations are less intimidating than walking onto a college campus. Being endorsed by their community organization lends credibility to our work. As such, we are able to establish relationships and build the trust needed for participants’ success.

What work do you propose undertaking during the granting period?

We propose an 8-week digital literacy program that includes intensive support by career navigators. A cohort of 25 participants will occur once per quarter over 12 months. Participants will receive skills training in Microsoft 365, develop internet searching skills, learn how to be safe online, and take a career aptitude test (Washington Career Bridge) to launch their post-secondary credential process. Formal classes will occur every Tuesday for 2 hours followed by open labs every Thursday for 2 hours. Additionally, we will have “guest speakers” from education and training sectors who can provide first-hand knowledge of their local certification programs and the steps needed to achieve them. This will also create a meet-and-greet opportunity for a soft hand-off to these connections.

	Concept	Session Skills
1	Computer Basics Operating Systems Guest Speakers: SJI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills assessment • intro to hardware and software
2	Internet I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic terminology • Career Bridge Assessment • navigating browsers – web training/admission applications and portals
3	Internet II: Cloud-Based Storage and AI Guest Speakers: CC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intro to cloud • cloud storage
4	Email Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overview of email • email etiquette • writing effective emails • electronic signatures
5	Teams and Zoom Guest Speakers: Trades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microsoft Teams • Zoom
6	Online Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common threats and security measures • overview of personal information • risks/protecting personal information online • identifying and avoiding Scams • safe online practices
7	LinkedIn, Indeed Training, and Word Essentials Guest Speakers: Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formatting, editing, tables • pathway development with milestones,
8	Excel and PowerPoint Guest Speaker: College Financial Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating and formatting spreadsheets and slides • post training skills assessment/Literacy credential

Those who complete at least 75% of the formal training will receive a laptop, a hotspot, one year of unlimited internet, and a carrying bag. This will provide them with the knowledge and tools to support their future training.

According to IEEE’s Connecting the Unconnected report, “digital literacy greatly affects the academic performance of students.” Additionally, according to Burning Glass Technologies, “82 percent of middle-skill jobs require digital skills. Also, middle-skill jobs that require digital skills offer higher pay than middle-skill jobs that don’t require digital skills.”

Whether it's taking a college course or applying for training, basic digital skills are fundamental to success. Being digitally literate is the 21st century equivalent of teaching someone to fish. By providing the technical and cognitive skills to handle a variety of technological tasks, applications, and hardware, we are teaching participants how to fish. Whether it's a twenty-something a few years removed from high school or a forty-something who has never received formal training, both need the foundational skills that will empower them to move forward.

SJI has an in-house instructor with CompTIA A+ Certification (preferred certification for technical support and IT operational roles) and extensive teaching experience. Since 2020, he has conducted digital literacy training for over 1,500 residents. Our staff is committed to empowering individuals with essential technological skill, pathway navigation, and support. The team has also provided valuable training to upskill workers and assist in their personal and professional development.

How will this proposed work contribute to increasing educational attainment for the focal population(s) in your region?

Everyone who participates in the training has the opportunity to earn Microsoft's Digital Literacy certificate. For some this will be their first "credential". We hope to leverage that success and kindle, or rekindle, each participant's desire to enroll in an education or training pathway. By gifting the technology, participants will now have the tools necessary to become independent online learners and learn at a time that works for their schedule.

Facilitated by intensive navigation, our goal is to provide appropriate wrap-around support services to diminish or remove existing barriers (food, childcare, transportation, etc.) to enrolling in post-secondary training. By gifting technology and training we provide the basic skills to move forward. Additionally, we are focusing our efforts on residents with the lowest credentialing rates.

Our blend of technical proficiency, cultural competency, practical teaching experience, and proven success as an intermediary, make our proposal for digital literacy education the bridge non-credentialed residents need to begin their post-secondary credentialing journey with confidence.