



COOK COUNTY
DIGITAL EQUITY



Cook County Library Digital Navigator Network Guiding Team

Purpose

Cook County's [Digital Equity Plan](#) champions public libraries as a major confidence-building support for residents developing the skills they need to use technology successfully in their daily lives. RAILS is partnering with the Cook County Office of the President to help implement their vision of a Digital Navigator Network among suburban Cook County's public libraries that builds capacity to sustain and enhance these critical services.

This collaboration, spearheaded by [Cook County Digital Equity](#) and supported by the [Cook County Equity Fund](#), envisions a mutually beneficial relationship with libraries that positions them as central change agents for digital equity. With the resources, partnerships, and capacity-building support they need to ensure every patron can access essential digital skills and devices, libraries can help anchor a sustainable County-wide digital navigation ecosystem. The Cook County Library Digital Navigator Network Guiding Team will work together in the co-design of this pilot program.

Role

The Guiding Team will shape a Cook County Library Digital Navigator Network model that is equitable, sustainable, builds on existing strengths, and creates systemic change. This could include necessary program components, priorities for support distribution, considerations for implementation, criteria for evaluation, and insights into sustainability.

Working through a facilitated human-centered design process, the team will articulate a shared vision of libraries' role as digital navigators and the capacity required for library agencies and staff to meet their communities' unique digital navigation needs. They will leverage empathy, creativity, and storytelling as they explore key questions and challenges such as:

- How might we challenge and expand the role of digital navigators beyond individuals, to function sustainably at an agency level?
- How might we define and facilitate a shared vision in a library landscape with significant resource gaps and varying needs?
- How might this program create positive impact for all 90+ public libraries in Cook County while ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities in areas that have

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experienced systemic disinvestment?

- How might we encourage and center the value of storytelling in program activities?
- What might we learn or adapt from other projects and current service models?

Membership

The Guiding Team will include approximately 12-15 suburban Cook County library representatives with diverse perspectives across geography, community size, funding levels, populations served, and cultural/linguistic representation. Members will be appointed by, and serve in collaboration with, lead personnel from the RAILS and Cook County teams.

Considerations for balancing the Guiding Team's composition include:

- Varied library staff roles (e.g. directors, librarians, technology assistants)
- Engaged non-staff champions (e.g. trustees, municipal leaders, community partners)
- Libraries currently providing robust digital navigation services
- Libraries without sufficient resources to meet their communities' demonstrated needs for access to technology and digital skills
- Experience with relevant grant programs and/or professional communities (e.g. PLA Digital Skills and Digital Navigator Workshop incentives, Cook County IMPACT grants, Secretary of State Technology Grants, Broadband READY projects, National Digital Inclusion Alliance membership)

Requested Commitment

Work will be both synchronous and asynchronous, beginning in Fall 2025 and culminating in early 2026 with the delivery of program design recommendations. Depending on the needs of the project, opportunities for participation may continue beyond this initial period.

Synchronous participation:

- Meetings via Zoom 1-2x per month, up to 1.5h each
- At least one in-person meeting, with location and frequency to be determined collaboratively
- Attendance at every meeting is not required, but sustained active engagement from members is essential in co-creating a program that represents diverse perspectives

Asynchronous participation will involve minimal required work between meetings, with additional optional contributions depending on individual availability. This may include:

- Emails or other written communication
- Background reading, research, and/or independent reflection
- Gathering input from colleagues or resources and information from your library
- Reviewing draft program materials and/or the results of test activities
- Sharing project information and engagement opportunities with your organizations and professional networks

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- Providing leadership and assistance in implementation activities
- Participating in follow-up research and professional presentations

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