

## The Digital Equity Accelerator Question-by-Question Guidelines

This document lists the short-answer questions from the inaugural Digital Equity Accelerator application, with additional guidance brought to you by Aspen Digital, in collaboration with HP. The information under each question is included to help you craft your answer. We encourage you to start with this document as you draft your answers prior to launching the application. Please carefully note the **word limit** for each written question and **seconds limit** for video entry - be clear, concise, and thoughtful in your responses. You do not have to use the entire field to answer open-ended questions. **The shorter the better!** The rest of the questions in the application are Yes/No, multiple choice, or contact information fields.

If you have any general questions about the application process, please visit the [FAQ](#) on our website. Specific questions can be directed to [digitalaccelerator@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:digitalaccelerator@aspeninstitute.org).

### **Organizational Profile**

**Tell us about your organization. (150 words)**

Think through questions like these, and be clear, concise and thoughtful in your answers: *Who are you? When were you established? What is your mission? Goals? Who do you serve and why? What types of projects or programs are you focused on? How have you achieved measurable impact?*

Remember - you only have 150 words, so tell us the most important aspects of who you are so we can quickly understand your goals, work and impact!

**Do you have any other time commitments outside of your current day-to-day work activities and personal responsibilities that might influence your ability to fully participate in our Accelerator? Examples may include additional fellowships/accelerators. (Yes/No)**

**If yes, please describe: (100 words)**

We are not looking to assess your personal responsibilities and commitments - only answer "yes" if you have additional professional time commitments outside of your work with the organization that is applying.

This could include other fellowships, accelerator programs, adjunct professorships, for example. We want to understand if those commitments overlap with the time frame of our Accelerator, and if so, how you will mitigate potential conflict and/or be able to fully commit to the work of the Accelerator.

- Does your organization already work to address digital equity? Note: your organization is not required to already work to advance digital equity, as long as you have (1) proven impact in at least one of our target communities and priority sectors, and (2) have a plan to build a project or program during the Accelerator that will advance digital equity solutions for these communities. (Yes/No)**
- If yes, how does your organization currently work to improve digital equity for the communities you serve? (150 words)**

Please see the below explanation of how we understand digital equity (also on the [FAQ](#) page). You are not required to have or plan to work in every aspect of digital equity - but at least one, and to be able to clearly describe how your work advances digital equity, if it does, in this section.

We reference the National Digital Inclusion Alliance's [definition](#):

*“Digital Equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.”*

- NDIA

We believe that digital equity consists of four pillars which, when met, will ensure that traditionally underserved and marginalized groups can fully participate in an increasingly digital society:

- **Access:** Access to digital infrastructure (i.e., hardware, the internet), tools, and opportunities (including economic success, education, and public health/healthcare)
- **Literacy:** Resources for families across generations to better use and understand new technologies and platforms, navigate new media and online information, and better protect themselves and their digital rights

- **Representation:** Meaningful inclusion of the perspectives and lived experiences of underrepresented communities in all aspects of the digital economy, from input into product design, to culturally diverse visual representation on social platforms, to the hiring of more diverse talent
- **Skills:** Technical skills and training needed to compete for jobs of the future and take ownership over the development of emerging technologies that directly affect their communities

## **The Need**

### **Why do you want to participate in the Digital Equity Accelerator? (200 words)**

We are looking for applicants to show that they have thought through how they would benefit from all aspects of the Accelerator - the agile digital equity project development component, nonprofit leadership and management training and mentoring, the hardware gift and the cash award. Help us understand how this connects to your impact goals.

### **What will you use this hardware for? (150 words)**

HP is directly providing limited hardware products to the best of their ability, noting potential distribution and supply chain challenges due to COVID-19. These may include, but are not limited to, the following: Desktop(s), Laptop(s), Printer(s), Printed material(s) (i.e. books, learning packets), Other.

Please illustrate that you have thought through what you might need and tell us why, including if you have “other” needs and what those might be, why, and how you will use these products in service of your organization’s mission and our shared goal to expand digital equity.

## **About Your Project**

- Project Summary: Briefly describe the project or program you plan to build or scale during your time in the Accelerator: Define the problem, how you are uniquely positioned to solve it, and the impact you will make. (500 words)**

### **Questions to consider:**

- What is the digital equity problem you are trying to solve?
- What are the main barriers to solving it?
- How will your project overcome these barriers and solve the problem?
- How is your organization uniquely positioned to solve this problem? Please describe current activities and strengths and capabilities of your organization.
- Which priority sector(s) and target community (or communities) will this project serve?
- How soon could you launch the project / what anticipated date?

*Note:* A primary goal of the Accelerator is to facilitate the development of this project, through training and iterative “product development” methods and intentional sessions with “growth advisors” and “experts on call.” That said, successful applicants will have already given significant thought and planning towards building a digital equity-centered project. Maybe you have already scoped the project’s needs but needed time and space to test your idea. Maybe you are almost done with your strategic planning of this project but need some help, technically and financially. Maybe you do amazing work in your communities in an adjacent field (e.g., literacy for underserved girls) and have been seeking external expertise to translate that expertise into the digital equity space. These are just a few examples of the type of organization we believe will be more successful in this application process. For a reminder of what we mean by ‘digital equity,’ see our [FAQ](#).

- How is your organization connected to the communities you will serve through this project and how will you keep their needs and experiences at the center of your work? (150 words)**

Consider: What past experience do you have working for these communities? Are any leaders in your organization members of your target communities? What lived and professional perspectives does your team bring to the challenges facing these communities?

- For this project, who are your partners and funders thus far, if any? Respond with "N/A" if this is not applicable to your project. (100 words)**

Consider: Are there other organizations, government-funded initiatives, or philanthropic projects actively seeking to address the same or a similar challenge in your target community? If so, have you thought through a potential partnership or plan to seek / have sought other funding for this project idea?

- What are your plans to foster more diversity, inclusion, and equity with the project? (150 words)**

Explain how you will ensure, or have ensured, that the design and implementation of your solution authentically embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion within the context of where and who your organization serves.

- Each participant will receive an over USD \$100,000 cash award. How do you plan to use this award? (100 words)**

We want to work with organizations that have a good understanding of their budget, needs, and how this cash award can further meet those needs. Help us understand how your organization might use these funds, and how it might directly support furthering your digital equity goals.

### **Project Impact**

For each of these questions, give us your best estimates. We want you to refine, test and build this in the Accelerator, and know that what you list here may not ultimately look anything like what your final project is - and that's ok! We just want to make sure you've thought through this process, know what questions you need to ask and have an idea, based on previous performance, of how you can measure these impacts. These estimates should make sense, in the context of your organizational capabilities, funding, support from across the ecosystem of resources in your community / partnerships, and the level of community engagement and impact you have already achieved in this or other areas.

**Measuring community impact: How do / will you measure your reach in the communities you serve? (100 words)**

Who will your digital equity project directly serve? Indirectly? Where are they located? It might be helpful to think in terms of a logframe or monitoring and evaluation matrix as a starting point - considering outputs, outcomes and impacts, as well as SMART goals. This [article](#) provides some helpful guidance. Note: We do NOT want a logframe; this is only meant to help you think through the different levels of impact your project can make as you answer this question.

**Reach: What is the estimated number of individuals/families/community members who will benefit from your project? (50 words)**

Following on from the previous question, this question allows you to provide a number of estimated reach. Please qualify with what the number is illustrating - individuals? Households? Teachers? Girls? etc.

**Scalability: How can your project be scaled in order to amplify its impact for the communities you serve? (150 words)**

How can this project be expanded beyond your initial pilot? How might growing the project change or increase the type or number of individuals or households you can serve? Additional services or adjacent aspects of digital equity?

**Sustainability: After receiving financial support, training, and hardware solutions through this Accelerator, how do you plan to sustain the program or project you wish beyond 2022? (150 words)**

A successful answer will describe your current vision to financially sustain the project, as well as how the project work and impact will be sustained within the community (through partnerships, for example).

**Optional: Other considerations (100 words)**

This field is completely optional (less is more!). Only include information about Project Impact here if there is anything not covered in the questions above that you feel is vital to adequately understanding your vision for impact with this project.

- Please upload a video concisely sharing an overview of who you are, what your project is, and how you will make real, achievable, scalable and sustainable impact towards digital equity in service of your target communities.**

You are required to submit a video that captures who you are, your current plan for the digital equity project you want to build during the Accelerator, and why participating in this program will help you achieve impact. The video is an opportunity to showcase your passion and to pitch your story in a succinct format. We want you to share your vision with the selection committee in a way that is different from the written proposal format. This DOES NOT need to be a professionally produced video (please do not spend time doing that!); video shot on a smartphone is preferred.

In order to complete this part of your application, your team will upload a short digital film using YouTube.

Set the Privacy Settings on your video to Public or Unlisted – do not set them to Private. This will be viewed by peers and judges of the competition.

Your video may be extracted from your submission and made available to the public and other donors. Appeal to a broad audience. Video submissions should follow these guidelines or else it will render the application ineligible:

- A length of no more than 2 minutes.
- Your pitch must be in English.
- Your video should not contain any images of identifiable children (under age 18) without express parental consent.
- Your video should not include any copyrighted material (including, but not limited to, music) for which you do not have a license.

Here are general suggestions for delivering a high-quality video pitch:

- Introduce yourself and your organization.
- Describe the challenges, solutions, and target communities your organization serves.
- Share key impact measurements, in context, that show how you have already established a degree of impact in your community.

- Describe the digital equity project you aim to build during the Accelerator, including the stated problem, your proposed solution at the time of application, what is unique about your solution, and how you would plan to measure success and achieve meaningful, scalable, sustainable impact.

### **Your Team**

- Successful applicants to the Accelerator will have a demonstrated commitment to justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion both within their own team and how they connect to the communities they serve. How does your organization authentically demonstrate this commitment? (200 words)**

We want to support organizations that “walk the talk” of their commitment to justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion - not only in projects and programs serving others. How does your organization lead internally with these values? Externally? What changes have you made or steps have you taken to re-evaluate and shift your own thinking and actions in these areas? How are these values represented in your leadership, staffing, and other organizational decisions?