Insights from digitalLIFT's Partner Sector and Industry Survey

AUGUST 2025

digital LIFT
Formerly Community Tech Network (CTN)

Executive Summary

This white paper presents findings from a national survey of 58 organizations across sectors and regions, exploring barriers, opportunities and trends in digital equity work. Nearly 80% of respondents currently or previously offer digital skills training, with strong representation from Aging Services, Education, Libraries, and Digital Equity sectors. Respondents serve a wide range of vulnerable populations, including older adults, immigrants, rural communities, low-literacy and low income individuals.

Key challenges include limited funding, low digital literacy among clients, language barriers, and lack of affordable internet or devices. Lack of affordable devices and tech support was mentioned a few times as well. Regional disparities reveal that the West and Southwest are leading in training engagement, while the Southeast and Midwest face foundational barriers. The results highlight both systemic challenges and promising sectoral strengths, offering a roadmap for funders, policymakers, and community leaders to invest in scalable, inclusive solutions. These insights inform targeted strategies for digitalLIFT to expand impact through needs assessments, curriculum development, and capacity building services.

Survey Overview

- **A Google Form sent to 5000+ of contacts via email in August 2025**

- **Total Responses:** 58 organizations

- **Geographic Reach:** 18 states, with highest representation from California (26%), Texas (12%), North Carolina (10%), plus one Toronto ON, Canada and one from Saipan Northern Mariana Islands

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Regional Breakdown

Region	Covering	Count	% of Total
West	CA, CO, UT, WA, Saipan	23	40%
Southwest	TX, NM	8	14%
Midwest	IL, IN, KY, MI, OH	11	19%
Southeast	AL, LA, NC	8	14%
Northeast	MA, MD, NJ, NY, Toronto	8	14%

Industry Breakdown

Industry	# of Mentions	% of Total
Education & Training	14	24%
Digital Equity	11	19%
Nonprofit & Social Services	8	14%
Library	5	9%
Health & Wellness	5	9%
Government	4	7%
Advocacy & Information	4	7%
Housing	4	7%
Other	3	5%

Populations Served

Population Group	# of Mentions	% of Total
Low-income communities	31	53%
Aging	27	47%
Low-literacy populations	16	28%
ESL/ Immigrants	13	22%
People with disabilities	13	22%
Rural	11	19%
Veterans	8	14%
Incarcerated / re-entry	8	14%
Health	5	9%
LGBTQI+	4	7%

Key Findings by REGION

The West reports the highest experience with digital literacy programs, with about 83% of organizations currently or previously providing training, followed by the Southwest (80%) and Northeast (75%). The Midwest and Southeast show more moderate engagement at 73% and 67%, respectively.

While training is prevalent, the challenges organizations face differ by region. In the West, funding limitations (70%) and staffing or volunteer retention (65%) are top concerns, alongside adapting curricula to varying literacy levels. The Southwest struggles most with access—nearly two-thirds cite lack of devices or internet and language barriers, with additional challenges in keeping up with rapid tech changes. In the Midwest, low client digital literacy (73%) is the most pressing issue, coupled with staffing capacity and access gaps. The Southeast highlights language barriers (63%) and gaps in curriculum relevance and infrastructure. Meanwhile, the Northeast is heavily constrained by funding (75%), as well as challenges in curriculum design and technology upgrades. Together, these findings suggest regional differences in digital inclusion priorities, with some areas focused more on access, others on literacy, and nearly all grappling with limited resources, namely funding and staffing.

West (n = 23)

- Highest training engagement (≈83% currently or previously offer digital skills training.)
- Top challenges:
  - Funding constraints – 70%
  - Staff capacity and volunteer retention – 65%
  - Curriculum relevance across literacy levels – 52%
  - Language barriers – 48%

Southwest (n = 8)

- Moderate training engagement (≈73%)
- Top challenges:
  - Low digital literacy among clients – 73%
  - Staff capacity and volunteer retention – 64%
  - Lack of devices/internet access – 55%
  - Curriculum relevance – 45%

Midwest (n = 11)

- Moderate training engagement (≈73%)
- Top challenges:
  - Low digital literacy among clients – 73%
  - Staff capacity and volunteer retention – 64%
  - Lack of devices/internet access – 55%
  - Curriculum relevance – 45%

Southeast (n = 8)

- Moderate training engagement (≈67%)
- Top challenges:
  - Language barriers – 63%
  - Curriculum relevance – 50%
  - Limited program infrastructure – 50%
  - Low digital literacy among clients – 38%

Northeast (n = 8)

- High training engagement (≈75%)
- Top challenges:
  - Funding constraints – 75%
  - Curriculum design and evaluation tools – 50%
  - Technology upgrades – 50%

Key Findings by SECTOR

Across sectors, limited funding is the most pressing barrier. Low digital literacy among community members is another consistent issue, especially in libraries (100%) and digital equity-focused organizations (82%). Language barriers in digital tools and training also present challenges particularly in education and nonprofit settings. Overall, the findings highlight both the widespread commitment to digital inclusion efforts and the persistent structural challenges: particularly funding and baseline digital literacy, that limit impact and scalability.

1. Education & Training (n = 14)
- Training Engagement: 10 of 14 organizations (71%) currently or previously offer digital skills training.
- Population Served:
  - Rural - 43%
  - Low-income communities - 36%
  - Low-literacy populations - 36%
- Top Reported Challenges:
  - Limited funding to support digital programs - 86%
  - Low digital literacy among community members - 64%
  - Language barriers in available digital tools or training - 57%

2. Digital Equity (n = 11)
- Training Engagement: 9 of 11 organizations (82%) offer digital skills training.
- Populations Served:
  - Low-income communities - 73%
  - Aging - 64%
- Top Challenges:
  - Low digital literacy among community members - 82%
  - Limited funding to support digital programs - 64%

3. Nonprofit & Social Services (n = 8)
- Training Engagement: 7 of 8 organizations (88%) offer digital skills training.
- Populations Served:
  - Low-income communities - 50%
  - Aging - 50%
  - Low-literacy populations - 38%

- Top Challenges:
  - Limited funding to support digital programs - 63%
  - Low digital literacy among community members - 63%
  - Language barriers in available digital tools or training - 38%

4. Library (n = 5)
- Training Engagement: 4 of 5 organizations (80%) offer digital skills training.
- Populations Served:
  - Low-income communities - 80%
  - Aging - 80%
  - Low-literacy populations - 60%
- Top Challenges:
  - Low digital literacy among community members - 100%
  - Limited funding to support digital programs - 80%

5. Health & Wellness (n = 5)
- Training Engagement: 4 of 5 organizations (80%) offer digital skills training.
- Populations Served:
  - Aging - 40%
  - Health - 40%
- Top Challenges:
  - Limited funding to support digital programs - 100%
  - Low digital literacy among community members - 60%

Comparative Analysis: Digital Skills Training

Is your organization currently offering, or has it previously offered, any digital skills training?

Training Status	Count	% of Total (58)
Yes (Current or Past)	46	79%
No	12	21%

Top Challenges (Organization has digital training experience, n = 46)

Challenge	Mentions	% of Group
Limited funding to support digital programs	37	80%
Low digital literacy among community members	34	74%
Limited or no access to affordable internet service	29	63%
Language barriers	20	43%

Top Challenges (Organizations without digital training experience, n = 12)

Challenge	Mentions	% of Group
Limited funding to support digital programs	8	67%
Low digital literacy among community members	7	58%
Limited or no access to affordable internet service	5	42%
Language barriers	4	33%

Across both groups – organizations with and without digital training experience – limited funding consistently emerges as the top barrier. Among those already offering training (n=46), 80% cite funding challenges, followed closely by low digital literacy among community members (74%). Access barriers are also significant, with nearly two-thirds (63%) pointing to limited or unaffordable internet service, and 43% noting language barriers.

Organizations without digital training experience (n=12) report a similar set of challenges, though at slightly lower rates. Two-thirds identify limited funding as their greatest obstacle, while more than half (58%) point to gaps in affordable internet access. Low digital literacy (42%) and language barriers (33%) are also prevalent. Together, these findings underscore that regardless of training experience, funding constraints, connectivity gaps, and low baseline digital skills remain the most persistent and systemic challenges to advancing digital equity.

Opportunities for digitalLIFT

1. **Offer DigitalLift's Needs Assessment to Active Training Organizations**

   Provide assessments to organizations with digital literacy program experience to pinpoint curriculum gaps, infrastructure needs, and staffing capacity challenges, enabling more targeted improvements.

2. **Activate Non-Training Organizations**

   Support phased pathways to help them integrate digital skills into their existing programs. Bring them into the digital equity ecosystem by providing starter toolkits and peer-to-peer mentorship.

3. **Support High-Need Populations**

   Design and prioritize curriculum tailored for older adults, immigrants, rural residents, people with disabilities, and low-literacy learners to ensure equitable access to digital opportunities.

4. **Expand and Enhance "Beyond the Basics" Curriculum**

   Grow advanced training offerings with multilingual, low-literacy-friendly workshops that move learners from basic skills to digital independence.

5. **Launch Nationwide Virtual Direct Services**

   Launch affordable, remote tech support and tutoring services to bridge gaps in underserved regions in multiple languages to meet diverse community needs.

Conclusion

The August 2025 survey confirms that digital equity efforts are widespread but uneven. Most responding organizations are actively engaged in digital skills training, yet face persistent challenges in funding, low digital literacy and lack of affordable internet services and devices in the community. Vulnerable populations—especially older adults, immigrants, and low-literacy communities—remain underserved in many regions.

digitalLIFT is well-positioned to address these gaps through targeted assessments, curriculum expansion, and virtual service delivery. By aligning strategies with sector strengths and regional readiness, digitalLIFT can accelerate inclusive digital access nationwide.

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