

Digital Inclusion Coalitions

Leadership Brief | Fall 2023

Digital Inclusion Coalitions provide the unique service of developing their communities' digital inclusion ecosystems.

Coalitions advance digital equity by providing collective empowerment, alignment, coordination, and amplification of member organizations' digital inclusion efforts.



Like much of today's community-based [digital inclusion](#) work, coalitions in this space are a relatively new concept – continuously learning best practices from on-the-ground experience, responding to community needs based on evolving technology, and responding to changing circumstances.

Digital inclusion coalitions are a collective of organizations operating in a formalized structure shaped by the community to advance digital equity and foster the growth of the community's [digital inclusion ecosystem](#). Coalitions are a valuable and fast-growing component of Tribal, local, regional, and state digital inclusion ecosystems.

As Digital Inclusion Coalitions strive to expand impact, they experience many similar challenges:

- Lack of resources
- Disruptive leadership changes
- Difficulties in diversifying their membership to represent their unique communities



Digital Inclusion Coalitions: Leadership Brief | Fall 2023

The longest continually operating digital inclusion coalitions have been around more than 10 years, with more coming onto the scene during the COVID-19 pandemic as community leaders and policymakers grew to understand the urgency of addressing digital inequities.

Coalitions convene stakeholders at a shared table to address digital inclusion needs. They include community members, institutional leaders, organizations like libraries, digital skills instructors, local and Tribal governments, and nonprofit service organizations. Coalitions work collaboratively to reduce gaps in home broadband access, digital skills, and access to appropriate devices.



Strengthening Digital Inclusion Coalitions

To maximize the coalition’s ability to support digital equity, coalitions should:

- **Establish organizational leadership and a decision-making structure.** Formalize the coalition’s leadership and decision-making structure.

Successful coalitions have formal governance frameworks that outline leadership functions, address leadership changes, and establish the coalitions’ missions and visions.

A shared leadership structure empowers multiple individuals from member organizations in their areas of expertise. Relying on a single organization as the driving force impacts the coalition’s stability if they cannot continue in that leadership role.

Establish a collaborative of three to five organizations to serve as a steering committee or consider ways to rotate leadership among member organizations. Co-chairs or a steering committee help spread responsibility and ownership across member organizations.

- **Identify resource needs and how to support them.** Coalitions often acquire resources through grants, volunteered time and services, and local government support. Needed resources include:
 - Dedicated staff
 - Clear governance structure
 - Administrative and meeting support
 - Creation and maintenance of a website and other digital communications platforms
 - Strategic planning
 - Funding management for coalition operations and associated activities.

Digital Inclusion Coalitions: Leadership Brief | Fall 2023

Coalitions should develop a way to receive and disburse funding and other resources on behalf of coalition members by coordinating with a backbone organization or creating a 501(c)(3). If resources allow, hire a dedicated program coordinator, even at 0.25 or 0.5 FTE. Successful coalitions that don't have dedicated funding for staff find that rotating these activities on a quarterly or half-year basis prevents burnout and encourages active participation among member organizations.

- **Build membership and share successes.**

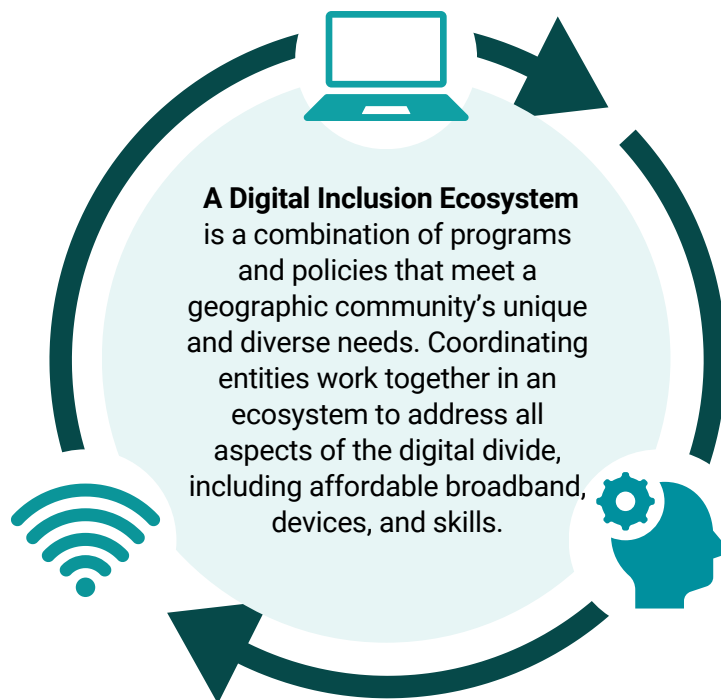
Coalitions can bring awareness to their common mission, the digital inclusion movement, and the services/benefits the coalition and members can provide. Coalitions can gain recognition by building a broad membership base and a cohesive public presence.

Establishing a known brand can also help a coalition amplify digital equity and the work of its members. Encourage continuous community input and encourage ownership through listening sessions, town hall meetings, and roundtable discussions.

Spotlighting members during meetings, in a newsletter, or on the coalition's website gives them space to share their efforts, partnership opportunities, and potential avenues to diversify membership. Successful coalitions invite and include their community members to the table and help them share their experiences through meaningful engagements, such as when local governments are designing digital inclusion plans.

Need to find out more about digital inclusion? Start with NDIA's definition page.

digitalinclusion.org/definitions



Digital Inclusion Coalitions: Leadership Brief | Fall 2023

- Join, learn, and share.** Join NDIA as an Affiliate or Affiliate+ member for digital inclusion practitioner support. NDIA hosts a robust community of organizations and coalitions working to advance digital equity nationwide. Nonprofits and government organizations, who are NDIA Affiliates, can access the Coalition Working Group and Coalition Listserv. The NDIA Coalition Working Group meets monthly to surface best practices from the field. The NDIA Coalition Listserv provides a forum for open discussions and peer-to-peer learning among members representing coalitions at each stage of development. Register your digital inclusion coalition with NDIA at digitalinclusion.org/sign-up-your-coalition.
- Connect with other local coalitions.** Successful digital inclusion coalitions collaborate and participate in conversations and planning with other coalitions across their state and across the country, where they are geographically and demographically similar. Identify if there is a regional or statewide coalition to join to further influence digital equity needs. Search [NDIA's Affiliates](#) to locate groups near you.
- Map community assets and understand the digital ecosystem.** Undertake an asset mapping effort to identify potential members, resources to support the coalition, and existing programs to include or support. Use NDIA's open-access tools for guidance on community [asset mapping](#).
- Balance advocacy and services.** Provide digital inclusion programming by supporting members in applying for grants, fostering partnerships between members and the larger community, and providing engagement and outreach support for the initiatives. Successful coalitions balance growing membership with advancing programmatic digital inclusion work. These needs change over time, and coalitions must reflect that.

Explore more tips, digital inclusion coalition models, and community examples in [NDIA's Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook](#).

