



**Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)
ARPA 2024-01:
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Local Capacity
Digital Equity Building Grant
Issued: December 19, 2023**

Responses due: January 19, 2024, 5:00 PM PST

Optional Applicants' Conference

Thursday January 4, 2024

2:00 PM – 3:00 PM PST

The Applicants' Conference will be held via Google Meet and requires advance registration.

Register for the Optional Applicants' Conference at:
<https://rb.gy/rvmao>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

CONTENTS		SUBMIT APPLICATIONS TO:
Section 1	Scope of Services	solanoconnected@techexchange.org
Section 2	Notice of Funding Availability Process	Subject Line: NOFA 2024-01 ARPA Local Capacity Building Digital Equity Grant Program
Section 3	Instructions to Applicants	NOFA COORDINATOR:
Section 4	Evaluation, Selection, and Award Process	Linda Roman linda@techexchange.org
Section 5	Contract Information	Written questions regarding this NOFA may be submitted to the NOFA Coordinator no later than January 10th, 2024, 5 pm subject line: NOFA #2023-11 Questions. Questions may also be asked at the Optional Applicants' Conference.
Section 6	Terms and Conditions	
Attachment A: Application Form		
Attachment B: Solano County Standard Agreement		

1 SCOPE OF SERVICES

1.1 Overview

Tech Exchange and Solano County DOIT are launching a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Digital Equity Programs and Services in Solano County, with a total funding amount of **\$250,000 (over 12-18 months thru no later than December 31, 2025)**. The RFP aims to identify qualified organizations or institutions that can provide innovative solutions and comprehensive strategies to develop the core areas of programs and services to address the digital inequities within Solano County communities.

Up to **\$250,000** is available under this Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). Multiple recipients (4-6 approximately) will be issued awards ranging from \$20,000 - \$50,000 for 12-18 month periods. (All funds must be used no later than December 31, 2025). Applicants must specify the duration of their programs for this grant, which must be between 12 to 18 months.

Non-profit organizations with 501(c) status are eligible to apply. Governmental entities, except Departments of the County of Solano, are also eligible to apply. Applicants must be operating in Solano County for at least 12 months to be eligible to apply.

1.2 Background

The Solano County Department of Information Technology secured funding from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was signed into law on March 11, 2021 with the intent to launch and execute Digital Equity Programs and Services across the county. A key focus of this program is to promote access to affordable internet to communities in need, as well as access to digital skills and devices.

Tech Exchange has been engaged with the Solano County Department of Information Technology to oversee the execution of Solano County's digital equity services and programs, which will support bridging the digital divide, empower individuals with essential digital skills and ensure access to internet services. Tech Exchange has been performing this work for 2 years (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2025).

The Solano County Connected consortium is made up of community based organizations, and county agencies working together to empower Solano County through Digital Skills Training, Affordable Internet Access, and Digital Inclusion Awareness. The Solano Connected Consortium guided by Tech Exchange is a collective body tasked with engaging community members, organizations, and institutions to ensure the full vision of the County's Digital Equity Programs and services are realized.

Funding for this NOFA is provided out of Solano County's aforementioned ARPA funds for Digital Equity. All projects are required to meet the most recent guidance for the SLFRF Revenue Recovery Expenditure Category by the United States Department of Treasury which can be found at: "cite?"

NOTE: ALL GRANTEES (APPLICANTS WHO ARE AWARDED A GRANT/CONTRACT) MUST ATTAIN AND PROVIDE PROOF OF A UEI SAM NUMBER WITH THEIR APPLICATION.

SAM UEI NUMBER CAN BE ATTAINED HERE:

https://sam.directory/UEI?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiAgK2qBhCHARIsAGACuzIq84Cc1CDhetN25DIdYv9Znu4yG3cFnI58-bn1slfQtOkPzgA4_cMaArnvEALw_wcB

1.3 Description of Services

Grant Program Focus: The local grant program will have two focuses. Organizations are encouraged to apply within one or both grant program areas. The core areas of programs and services are:

1. Digital literacy and education services

Goal: Increase digital literacy skills among Solano County residents

Ensure accomplishment: Regularly assess the participants progress through pre- and post-training assessments to track skill development. Maintain feedback with trainers and learners to identify areas for improvement and address any challenges.

2. Enrollment services for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)

Goal: Expand affordable internet access options (ACP) for low-income residents in Solano County

Ensure accomplishment: Regularly evaluate the number of low-income households that have subscribed to affordable internet plans along with keeping track of how many have enrolled in the ACP. Conduct surveys to gather feedback from program participants and make necessary adjustments to improve accessibility and affordability.

Funding may be used to continue existing services which have decreased or will experience a gap in funding or may be used to expand an existing effort if the expansion is related to an increased need because of the pandemic. This funding is not intended to support the development and start-up costs of a completely new organization with no prior service delivery experience. Respondents must be able to demonstrate relevant previous experience, capacity, and commitment to successfully implement a program or initiative.

1.4 Funding Availability

Funding is available through this NOFA in the amount of **\$250,000** with awards ranging from **\$20,000 – \$50,000** over an approximately 12-18 month period (approximately February 15, 2024-December 31, 2025). Agencies may only submit one Application for **\$20,000 - \$50,000** for this NOFA. Funding decisions and amounts will be made by Solano County.

No monies from this program may be used to supplant state, county or local general fund monies available to the agency for any purpose. Funds are not allocated for capital improvements.

2.1 Eligible Applicants

“Applicant” is any individual or entity that submits an Application in response to the NOFA. Non-profit organizations with 501(c) status are eligible to submit an Application. Local government agencies, senior centers, schools, libraries, non-profit organizations and community-based organizations with programs to increase broadband access and digital inclusion, such as digital literacy programs are eligible to apply.

2.2 Optional Applicants' Conference

Potential Applicants are encouraged to attend an Optional Applicants' Conference on Thursday January 4, 2024 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM PST. The Applicants' Conference requires advanced registration. To register for the Mandatory Applicants' Conference visit:

<https://rb.gy/rvrnao>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

The purpose of the conference is to provide an overview of the NOFA and provide an opportunity for potential Applicants to ask specific questions regarding this NOFA. Potential Applicants may submit questions in writing before or during the conference (see 2.3 below). The County will entertain questions written in the chat or verbal questions asked at the conference, but verbal responses at the Applicant Conference are nonbinding. Written responses to all questions will be provided by January 12, 2023 to each individual/agency in attendance at the Applicants' Conference via email and on the Solano County website.

2.3 NOFA Inquiries and Requests for Information

Inquiries and questions regarding the NOFA may be made via email to the Solano Connected Senior Manager at linda@techexchange.org with the Subject line: NOFA 2024-01 Questions. All emailed inquiries must be received by January 10th, 5:00pm PST. Inquiries may also be made at the Applicants' Conference. The County will provide written responses to all inquiries by January 12th, 2024 to each individual/agency in attendance at the Applicants' Conference via email and on the Solano County website.

2.4 Schedule of NOFA Events

The following Schedule of Events reflects important dates for the selection process; however, the County reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to adjust this schedule as it deems necessary. Notification of any adjustment to the Schedule of Events will be posted on the Solano County website. Applicants are responsible to view the website continually for any revisions.

EVENT		DATE
1	County Issues NOFA	Tuesday December 19th, 2023
2	Optional Applicants' Conference Registration required. Register at: https://rb.gy/rvrnao	Thursday January 4th, 2024, 2:00 – 3:00 PM PST
3	Deadline for Submitting Written Questions to NOFA Coordinator at linda@techexchange.org Subject line: NOFA 2023-11 Questions	January 10, 2024 5:00 PM

4	Written Responses to NOFA inquiries issued	January 12, 2024
5	Deadline for Submitting an Application to: solanoconnected@techexchange.org Subject Line: NOFA 2023-11 ARPA Local Capacity Building Digital Equity Grant Program	Monday January 19 2024, 5:00PM PST
6	Evaluation Committee issues recommendations	January 30, 2024
7	County Administrator approves funding	February 2, 2024
8	Contract development and negotiations period	February 5-February 10, 2024
9	Contract signed by Contractor	February 15, 2024
10	Contracts fully executed and services begin	February 15, 2024

Note: Every effort will be made to prioritize contract development, negotiation, and execution for successful Applications who demonstrate time sensitive needs.

2.5 Application Submittal and Withdrawal

Applicants must fully complete the Application in the format required by the County and respond to every question.

Applications must be emailed to solanoconnected@techexchange.org with the subject line as **NOFA 2024-01 ARPA Local Capacity Building Digital Equity Grant Program** and must be received by **5:00 PM PST on January 19th, 2024.**

Applicants must fully complete the Application in the format required by the County and respond to every question. Page 2 of Application must be “wet-signed” and scanned or signed digitally using an eSignature program, such as DocuSign.

The County assumes no responsibility for delays caused by email delay or errors.

The County will not pay any costs associated with the preparation, submittal, or presentation of any Application. To withdraw an Application, the Applicant must submit a written request, signed by an authorized representative, to the County. After withdrawing a previously submitted Application, the Applicant may submit another Application at any time up to the deadline for submitting Applications. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

3 INSTRUCTIONS TO APPLICANTS

3.1 Mandatory Application Form

The County has provided an Application Form (Attachment A).

Applicants must fully complete and sign the Application Form, responding to every question, and attach all necessary requested documents. Applicants must fill in desired check boxes and adhere to page limits where indicated.

Failure to follow the specified Application Form and format may, at the County's sole discretion, result in the rejection of the Application.

3.2 Application Format

Notwithstanding the format imposed by the Application Form in Attachment A, all Applicants must follow additional formats set forth herein:

- Standard, 8 1/2" x 11" format, with 1-inch margins
- Arial font size 11
- All Application pages sequentially numbered
- All responses, as well as any reference material presented, written in English, adhering to character limits where applicable
- All monetary amounts detailed in United States currency and rounded to the nearest whole dollar

3.3 Signatures

All signatures must be "wet-signed" and scanned or signed digitally using an eSignature program, such as DocuSign.

3.4 Application Submittal

Applications must be emailed to solanoconnected@techexchange.org with the subject line as **NOFA 2024-01 ARPA Local Capacity Building Digital Equity Grant Program** and must be received by **5:00 PM PST on January 19th, 2024** in accordance with section 2.5.

4 EVALUATION, SELECTION AND AWARD PROCESS

4.1 Compliance

The County will review all Applications to determine compliance with basic Application requirements as specified in this Application. Incomplete Applications may disqualify the Applicant from further consideration in this process.

4.2 Evaluation Process

The evaluation process is designed to recommend award(s) of funding to the Applicant(s) that can best provide activities outlined in this NOFA. Applications will be evaluated as set forth below.

An Evaluation Committee (EC) will evaluate all Applications. The EC will be composed of Tech Exchange, Solano County staff, and/or other parties that may have relevant expertise or experience. The EC will score and recommend Applications in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth in this NOFA. Evaluation of the Applications shall be within the sole judgment and discretion of the EC.

A maximum number of points will be assigned to each Application Element in the Application Packet as follows:

Application Elements	Maximum Score
Program Description	50 Points
Qualifications and Sustainability Plan	30 Points
Budget	20 Points
Total Maximum	100 Points

4.3 Application Review Criteria

Item	Possible Points	Points Total
Program Description		50
Applicant provides a clear description of activities, including how they will complete their goal within the 16-month timeframe.	15	
Applicant clearly describes the need, including impact of COVID-19 on agency operations, and how funds will be used to continue or expand an existing effort	15	
Applicant describes how activities will be integrated with other services at their agency and within the community, and how services are inclusive and equitable.	10	
The proposed activities/tasks, services counts, and results/outcomes are reasonable, clear, and related.	10	
Qualifications and Experience		30
Applicant clearly articulates their experience in doing work in the selected strategy area and why they are best suited to accomplish the work.	10	
Key personnel on the project have the qualifications and experience to carry out the activities.	10	
Applicant has a clear and reasonable sustainability plan	10	
Budget		20
Requested resources are appropriate to carry out the project.	10	
Resources needed to carry out the project are adequately described and clearly connected to the activities in the program description.	10	
Total Possible Points		100

The EC will rank all Applications based on their scores and recommend the top Applications for funding, up to a total funding amount of \$50,000. In addition, the EC may rank Applications not recommended for the initial funding amount to create an eligibility list for future funding. Should additional funding become available, these Applicants may be recommended for funding in the order ranked.

In addition to the EC recommendation, financial experts will review agency audited financial statements for solvency and internal controls to ensure adequacy for carrying out a contract with the County of Solano.

Final selection is at the sole discretion of the Solano County Board of Supervisors or its designee, which reserves the right to reject any or all Applications, or to make no selection based on this NOFA.

4.4 Best Value

Solano County will select the Application(s) that presents the best value and is most advantageous to the County and the public. Accordingly, the County may not necessarily award the Applicant with the

lowest price Application if doing so would not be in the overall best interest of the County. Solano County reserves the right to expand or reduce the proposed scope of work during the contracting process based on budget constraints and to award to single or multiple Applicants.

5 CONTRACT INFORMATION

5.1 Contract Qualifications

Complete a statement of acknowledgment (Attachment A-Application form, page 1) that the Applicant has reviewed the Proposed Solano County Standard Contract (Attachment B) and has accepted it with or without qualification. If the Applicant makes qualifications, those qualifications must be identified and listed along with suggested modifications to the contract. Note: Contract Exhibits A and B - the scope of work and budget - will be finalized during the contracting process. If the Applicant makes no qualifications to the Standard Contract, including its exhibits, then it shall be deemed that the Applicant accepts these items without reservation or any qualifications.

5.2 Contract Term/Duration

A contract that results from this NOFA may be awarded for up to 16-month period (approximately February 15, 2024 - June 30, 2025).

Note: The time frame above is estimated. The award of funds does not authorize work to begin. Contracts must be fully executed before services can begin. Services cannot begin prior to the contracted start date.

5.3 Funding and Payment Structure

As described in Section 1.4, funding is available through this NOFA in the amount of \$250,000 total (up to \$20,000 to \$50,000 per grant) over two 12-month periods (approximately January 19, 2024-December 31, 2025).

The contract to be negotiated will be a cost reimbursable contract, unless another methodology is requested in the Application and accepted by Solano County during contract negotiations. Funding will be negotiated and allocated based on the Application submitted, and reimbursement for the program/services will be based on actual costs incurred. All costs such as personnel, subcontractors, operating expenses and indirect costs must be reflected in the proposed budget.

5.4 Budget Definitions

A. Personnel Costs must include positions, salary, and "FTE" (actual percentage of time devoted to the project) for each position. Salary and fringe benefits must be pro-rated for non-full-time employees, if agency provides fringe benefits to part time employees. Salaries are fixed compensation for services performed by staff that are directly employed by the Applicant and are paid for on a regular basis. Employee benefits and employer payroll taxes include employer's contributions or expenses for social security, employee's life and health insurance plans, unemployment insurance, pension plans, and other similar expenses. These expenses are allowable when they are included in the contract and are in accordance with the agency's approved written policies.

B. Salaries and Benefits of personnel involved in more than one program must be charged to each program based on the actual percentage of time spent on each program. The annualized actual percentage charged for a particular position (e.g., Project Director) cannot exceed the annual percentage approved in the award. Similarly, the dollar amount charged for a particular position also

must not exceed the dollar amount in the approved award. Functional timesheets or an allocation plan must be maintained which support the time charged.

C. Operating Expenses are defined as necessary expenditures exclusive of personnel salaries, benefits and equipment. Such expenses include specific items directly charged to the project. The expenses must be program-related (i.e., to further the program objectives) and be incurred during the grant period. County reserves the right to make the final determination if an operating expense is allowable and necessary.

D. Indirect costs are shared costs that cannot be directly assigned to a particular activity but are necessary to the operation of the Agency and the performance of the program. The costs of operating and maintaining facilities, accounting services and administrative salaries are examples of indirect costs. For this program, indirect costs cannot exceed 15% of the total of Salaries and Benefits, and Operating Expenses.

5.5 Contract Award Process

- A. After the evaluation of Applications and final consideration of all pertinent information available, Solano County will either reject all Applications or issue a written notice of intent to recommend funding. The notice shall not create rights, interests, or claims of entitlement in the apparent best evaluated Applicants.
- B. This NOFA, its attachments, submitted questions and their answerers, and the Applications shall be incorporated into the final contract.
- C. The apparent best evaluated Applicants should be prepared to enter into a contract with Solano County which shall be substantially the same as the Standard Contract included in Attachment B to this NOFA. Notwithstanding this, Solano County reserves the right to add terms and conditions, deemed to be in the best interest of the County, during final contract negotiations.
- D. Contracts must be fully executed before services can begin. Services cannot begin prior to the contracted start date.
- E. If an Applicant fails to sign and return the contract drawn pursuant to this NOFA and final contract negotiations within 14 days of its delivery to the Applicant, Solano County may cancel the award and award the contract to the next best evaluated Applicant.

6 TERMS AND CONDITIONS

6.1 Protests and Appeals

Any actual Applicant who believes that the process was not conducted per the instructions provided in this NOFA and wishes to protest the notice of intent to award may submit a protest in writing to the Director of General Services within 7 calendar days after such Applicant knows or should have known of the facts giving rise to the protest, but in no event later than 7 calendar days after the date of the notice of intent to award. All letters of protest shall clearly identify the reasons and basis for the protest. The protest must also state the law, rule, regulation, or policy upon which the protest is based. The Director of General Services will issue a written decision within 10 working days after receipt of the protest which shall include the reason for the action taken and the process for appealing the decision.

6.2 County Purchasing Policy

The County's Purchasing & Contracting Policy Manual, found at <http://www.solanocounty.com/civicax/filebank/blobdload.aspx?blobid=21595> is fully incorporated into and made a part of this NOFA by this reference and governs this NOFA.

6.3 NOFA Amendment, Cancellation and Right of Rejection.

- A. Solano County reserves the unilateral right to amend this NOFA in writing at any time by posting the amendment on the Solano County website. Applicants are responsible for viewing the website periodically for any amendments to the NOFA. Applicants shall respond to the final written NOFA and any exhibits, attachments, and amendments.
- B. Solano County also reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to reject any and all Applications or to cancel or reissue the NOFA.
- C. Solano County reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to waive variances in Applications provided such action is in the best interest of the County. Where Solano County waives minor variances in Applications, such waiver does not modify the NOFA requirements or excuse the Applicant from full compliance with the NOFA. Notwithstanding any minor variance, Solano County may hold any Application to strict compliance with the NOFA.

6.4 Confidentiality

Solano County will retain a master copy of each response to this NOFA. Responses will become a public record after the award of a contract unless the qualifications or specific parts of the qualifications can be shown to be exempt by law under Government Code 7921.000 et seq. Applicants may clearly label part of a submittal as "CONFIDENTIAL" if the Applicant agrees to indemnify and defend the County for honoring such a designation. The failure to have so labeled any information shall constitute a complete waiver of all claims for damages caused by any release of the information. If a public records request for labeled information is received by the County, the County will notify the Applicant of the request and delay access to the material until 7 working days after notification to the Applicant. Within that time delay, it will be the Applicant's duty to act in protection of its labeled information. Failure to so act shall constitute a complete waiver.

6.5 Reservation of Rights

- A. Solano County reserves the right to reject any and all bids, or to cancel this NOFA in part or in its entirety.
- B. Solano County reserves the right to waive any variances in Applications provided such action is in the best interest of Solano County.
- C. Solano County reserves the right to amend this NOFA at any time. Solano County also reserves the right to cancel or reissue the NOFA at its sole discretion.
- D. Any bid received which does not meet the requirements of this NOFA, may be considered to be non-responsive, and may be rejected. Solano County may reject any bid that does not comply with all of the terms, conditions, and performance requirements of this NOFA.
- E. Solano County reserves the right to cancel any award and re-solicit bids for services herein specified due to the increased or added costs, if in its opinion increased prices are greater than those of the general market.
- F. Solano County reserves the right to cancel any award and re-solicit bids in the event services cannot commence with ten (10) days after the specified date for start of work.
- G. Solano County reserves the right to reject any and all Applications considered not to be in the best interest of Solano County.
- H. Solano County reserves the right to waive any and all minor irregularities in bids.

- I. Solano County reserves the right to reduce or increase any specification, in whole or in part due to budget constraints.

END OF REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS