

DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT KANSANS

PUBLIC PROPOSALS- SECOND ROUND



Application Title: Hutchinson Digital Inclusion

Organization Name: International Rescue Committee, Inc

Project Executive Summary

Goals of the proposed project:

The goal of IRC Wichita's proposed Digital Inclusion program is to equip low-income socially vulnerable populations in Reno County with critical digital literacy skills delivered in a trauma-informed, culturally competent and linguistically appropriate setting. Specifically, goals include:

- **Improving Training Access:** The program will reach at least 100 eligible Reno County residents with a focus on English language learners, providing vital digital literacy and skill-building classes in partnership with the City of Hutchinson and other community stakeholders.
- **Tailored Experiential Learning:** Hands-on digital lessons are designed to meet the needs identified through a comprehensive assessment of program participants, ensuring the curriculum is relevant and directly addresses individual needs and interests.
- **Enhancing Real-Life Digital Skills:** Through the program, participants will gain practical experience in activities relevant to their daily lives, from setting up email accounts and navigating their community with map applications to effectively searching for jobs.
- **Promoting Self-Sufficiency:** The program aims to increase self-sufficiency by integrating employment focused content and financial and social service navigation.
- **Encouraging Continuous Learning and Development:** Our program equips participants with initial digital skills and prepares them to pursue further learning opportunities and connect into other programs offered by the IRC and the Reno County community.
- **Access to Wi-Fi Services:** Through the program, participants will be supported to access Wi-Fi in their home. This will ensure participants can continue to learn and develop their digital skills.

Needs addressed by the proposed project:

Studies show that low-income, immigrant and minority groups are less likely to have internet access at home, less likely to have digital technology devices, and face greater barriers navigating digital content than other groups. With over 12% of Reno County's population living below the poverty line, enhancing digital literacy skills is crucial for increasing self-sufficiency and autonomy, especially among historically underserved groups such as low-income individuals, non-native English speakers, the elderly, and other economically and socially vulnerable communities.

Hutchinson, a city within Reno County that is the proposed site for this proposal, hosts a growing population of refugees from Ukraine and other countries, supported through community sponsorship programs. Additionally, 15% of the county's population comprises ethnic or racial minorities, who often face additional barriers in navigating an increasingly digital world.

This project addresses the needs that arise from this digital divide, where online information, resources, and opportunities are out of reach of certain groups in the community. Equipping residents with essential digital skills empowers individuals to navigate their daily lives more effectively—whether it's enabling them to communicate with their child's school through an online portal, search for employment, or use digital maps for navigation. For non-native English speakers and newcomers, learning to use translation applications can bridge language gaps, facilitating better communication within the community. This

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project is designed to empower historically marginalized groups to use technology to meet the demands of their daily lives and the needs that they identify as being priority for them.

Service partners involved in the proposed project:

This program will not have service partners or subcontractors but rather rely on community partners and volunteers to implement activities and collaborate.

Community and/or stakeholders involved in the proposed project:

The Hutchinson Refugee Project came together out of a desire for the City of Hutchinson to enhance its workforce by reaching out to immigrant communities. Thus, a small team applied for and received a workforce development grant to partner with IRC in a program called Community Sponsorship to welcome refugee families into their community. To date, eight community teams comprised of church members, philanthropic councils and friends have hosted 38 new refugees into the Hutchinson community.

The **City of Hutchinson's Human Relations Office** will act as the primary Community Anchor Institution (CAI) for the Hutchinson Digital Inclusion Program, overseeing the program's success by managing resources and personnel, leading digital marketing and media efforts, and providing in-person consultations.

The **Hutchinson Public Library** will also serve as a CAI, as it has agreed to donate the use of its computer lab to host the digital literacy classes. The Hutchinson Public Library is accessible to all populations and known for its neutral environment, conducive to nurturing learning, inclusion, and equality through community interaction.

The **United Way of Reno County** will manage the volunteer database and support the program's marketing efforts by promoting it to their network of partners. **Circles Reno County** will help connect the program to underserved communities, ensuring its effectiveness through targeted engagement with our community. **Hutchinson Community Foundation** will assist with developing assessments to measure the effectiveness of the program. **Hutch In Harmony** will lend administrative support and help to maintain the volunteer instructor database.

Intended impact of the proposed project:

The goal for this project is to deliver a community-based digital skills training targeting vulnerable populations in Reno County that is accessible, tailored, hands-on and self-sufficiency focused, connects to ongoing learning opportunities and supports participant internet access at home. The intended impact of delivering this training is that participants 1) have the skills and the confidence to navigate their daily lives, 2) apply the skills to build their economic and social self-sufficiency, and 3) experience greater autonomy and integration in their communities as a result. By targeting services to the immigrant community in the city of Hutchinson while still creating an inclusive learning environment for other vulnerable community members, the program aims to create a positive integration opportunity for the growing population of newcomers in the city.

The impact of digital literacy extends beyond individual benefits. Enhanced digital skills foster greater communication and connectivity within the community, creating a more inclusive and cohesive society. Digital literacy skills are a requirement for many quality jobs that can lead to economic prosperity.

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Technology has the power to help level the playing field, providing equal access to gainful employment, educational opportunities, and essential services.

Total project budget:

\$235,482.65 USD

Total amount requested in DOCK 2.0 funding:

\$217,801.65 USD