



## COMMISSION RECCOMENDATION

### COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

#### RECOMMENDATION NUMBER: 20240326-8

#### REGARDING: FY25 Recommendation for financial support for Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs (TARA) Division programming and digital inclusion efforts

**WHEREAS**, our stated vision is for Austin to be a beacon of sustainability, social equity, and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its community members, and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all;

**WHEREAS**, it is the defined responsibility of the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission (CTTC), according to our bylaws, to "advise the city council on community technology, telecommunications services," and "new sources of funding for community technology projects," to help realize the stated vision above;

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to the 2023 Work Plan, the CTTC hosted Digital Inclusion Town Hall Listening Sessions in 2022, 2023, 2024 and has unanimously agreed to host additional Digital Inclusion Town Listening Sessions;

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to the 2023 Work Plan, the CTTC hosted the All Together For Digital Inclusion Stakeholder Summit on 12/1/2023;

**WHEREAS**, these Listening Sessions and the Digital Inclusion Summit were developed with the help, coordination, and sponsorship of other key Digital Empowerment Community of Austin (DECA) members;

**WHEREAS**, the goal of the Digital Inclusion Town Hall Listening Sessions was to convene community members in community spaces (i.e., libraries and community centers) to directly share their lived experiences with the CTTC and others. Moreover, to provide policy advisors, policy makers, and/or direct service providers firsthand insights about Digital Inclusion challenges, solutions, and potential opportunities to better serve the community through better-informed policy or service recommendations and implementations. With this support system for producing events and collaborative partnerships still soundly in place;

**WHEREAS**, the successful 12/1/2023 Digital Inclusion Summit demonstrated how our digital inclusion ecosystem can benefit from a convening that would include businesses, internet service providers (ISPs), non-government organizations (NGOs), nonprofits, and government entities as key stakeholders and would support our 2014 Digital Inclusion Strategic Plan refresh;

**WHEREAS**, the “Summary Report on the Digital Inclusion Stakeholder Summit” details these benefits here: <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=420732>;

**WHEREAS**, previous events have depended upon unsustainable support from CTTC leadership that coordinated all event resources while also generating fiscal sponsorship, financial support, and in-kind sponsorships

**WHEREAS**, previous community events have utilized approved FSD-TARA budget for event interpretation services and refreshments

**WHEREAS**, the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission (CTTC) acknowledges its responsibility, as defined by its bylaws, to advise the city council on community technology and telecommunications services, as well as new sources of funding for community technology projects, in alignment with the vision for Austin to be a beacon of sustainability, social equity, and economic opportunity;

**WHEREAS**, the CTTC recognizes the essential role of the Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) in implementing the COA Digital Inclusion Strategy adopted in 2014 through Council Resolution No. 20140320-056;

**WHEREAS**, the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the need for digital inclusion efforts, emphasizing the importance of accessibility to digital resources, innovation within the digital inclusion ecosystem, and alignment of outcomes;

**WHEREAS**, the GTOPs budget has remained unchanged since FY20, despite increased demand and evolving digital inclusion needs;

**WHEREAS**, the Grant for Technology Opportunities Program (GTOPs) is a crucial grant administered by the Community Technology division aimed at enhancing the community's capacity to engage fully in the digital society;

**WHEREAS**, GTOPs offers three distinct award pathways tailored to meet the diverse needs of local Austin nonprofit groups seeking funding or devices, including Core Funding, Mini Funding, and Capacity Funding, thereby ensuring a comprehensive approach to addressing digital inclusion challenges;

**WHEREAS**, the Core Funding pathway, with grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$35,000, supports larger-scale initiatives aimed at significantly advancing digital inclusion efforts within the community;

**WHEREAS**, the Mini Funding pathway, offering grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000, serves as a vital resource for smaller-scale projects and initiatives seeking to make meaningful contributions to digital inclusion efforts in Austin;

**WHEREAS**, the Capacity Funding pathway, with grants ranging from \$150 to \$2,500, provides essential support to grassroots organizations and initiatives, enabling them to build capacity and expand their reach in addressing digital inclusion disparities within underserved communities;

**WHEREAS**, memo titled “*Grant For Technology Opportunities Program 2023 Action Plan*” dated September 13, 2023, authored by the Financial Services Department - Telecom & Regulatory Affairs recommended the City Re-Incorporate GTOPs Connect Funding to Other GTOPs Pathways with full CTTC support;

**WHEREAS**, GTOPs Connect has been a successful grant pathway with a persistent need reflected in Austin, but with federal support of the program being left uncertain leading to this reallocation;

**WHEREAS**, June 2022 Travis County data reflected that there were 124,820 families or households eligible for Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) in the Austin area. As of March of 2023 of the eligible Austin area households, 104,832 were unenrolled reflecting only 18% at that time;

**WHEREAS**, the CTTC has heard consistently from Digital Empowerment Community of Austin (DECA) partners committed to ACP signup that the program recipients faced enrollment hurdles that indicate ACP enrollment rates remain low;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:**

The CTTC recommends the City Council direct the City Manager to allocate \$7,500 from the FY25 budget for the Financial Services Department - Telecom & Regulatory Affairs to coordinate the funding and support the initiative (in partnership with the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission (CTTC)) for three planned Digital Inclusion Town Hall Listening Sessions in order to pay for supplies, snacks, coffee, translation services, and food sponsorship, thereby enhancing the accessibility and effectiveness of these crucial community events.

The CTTC also recommends the City Council direct the City Manager to allocate \$5000 from the FY25 budget for the Financial Services Department - Telecom & Regulatory Affairs to coordinate the funding and support the event (in partnership with the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission (CTTC)) for the Digital Inclusion Summit in order to pay for supplies, snacks, coffee, translation services, and food sponsorship, thereby supporting the successful execution of this yearly event.

The CTTC further recommends to allocate \$500,000 for GTOPs in the FY25 City of Austin budget, reflecting an increase from previous allocations to address the growing needs of digital inclusion efforts;

To continue supporting Digital Inclusion resource accessibility, fostering ecosystem innovations, and ensuring outcome-focused alignment within the GTOPs program to effectively address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond;

Date of Approval: March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Record of the Vote for Recommendation 20240326-8a: Approved by the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission on a vote of 8-0.

Record of the Vote for Recommendation 20240326-8b: Approved by the Community Technology and Telecommunications Commission on a vote of 7-0.

ATTEST:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Martinez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "D" and "M".

Dan Martinez

Telecommunications & Regulatory Affairs

City of Austin