Digital Bridge Program Overview

For over 25 years, SDFF has been a catalyst for positive change in San Diego County, providing critical digital services and resources to nonprofits and individuals in need. Our programs have consistently helped bridge the gap between technology access and digital skills enabling thousands of nonprofits and residents to navigate the digital landscape more effectively. Through our various initiatives, we have empowered communities, enhanced educational outcomes, and supported local economic development by fostering a digitally inclusive environment.

SDFF's long history demonstrates a unique and enduring commitment to taking on the challenges of the digital divide. Through our in-community programs and experience, we developed a comprehensive program that is built around a suite of services that connects with and assists underserved populations. Through our innovative *Digital Bridge* program, SDFF is at the forefront of those working in San Diego County to address the digital divide.

Problem and Need

Consider how challenging life would be without essential services like water or electricity—this is the reality for many when it comes to digital access. Lacking internet access and digital resources, individuals are unable to fully participate in life.

For more than three decades there has been a well-recognized divide between those who have benefited from the wave of technological change and those who have lacked access to technology or been left behind by a lack of digital skills. The move to online services across the economy and throughout government has changed society to the point that connectivity has become a lifeline utility like water or electricity. One cannot fully participate in the economy, easily engage public services, or economically advance without a combination technology access and skills. As the SANDAG Digital Equity Taskforce highlights, underserved populations are disproportionately affected, exacerbating socioeconomic disparities. A prime example comes from the National Skills Coalition that reported that 92% of all jobs now

require digital skills, yet too many residents in San Diego County remain digitally excluded. The California State Digital Equity Plan reveals that nearly one-third of California households do not have reliable broadband internet access, and some may lose access as various programs are ending.

Introducing the Digital Bridge

The comprehensive approach of SDFF's Digital Bridge program not only addresses immediate digital skills and access needs, but also fosters long-term community development and individual empowerment through education, support, and workforce development. The program format is flexible and can be adjusted to accommodate alternative content or delivery styles as agreed upon, ensuring we maintain high service levels. Further, by expanding and mobilizing our internship programs, we achieve a dual benefit of enhancing cybersecurity skills for residents and diversifying and fueling San Diego's cybersecurity talent pool. Partnering with workforce organizations enables SDFF to bridge the education-employment gap and align talent development with regional business needs.

The Digital Bridge program services are built around a standardized model designed to maximize efficiency and impact. Each service day consists of at least 5 hours and can be extended to a maximum of 6. The program aims to address these critical needs by expanding the following services across San Diego County.

Free Educational Workshops:

- Focus on topics such as operating system basics, word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, and email.
- Promote internet access, affordability, and education.
- Internet savvy training focused on managing home networks, internet connectivity, online privacy, security, and avoiding frauds.
- Customizable content to meet the specific needs of targeted communities or hosting sites.

Free Basic Technical Support:

- Onsite community technicians (interns) are available to answer basic technical questions and provide non-destructive troubleshooting.
- The free service reduces barriers and costs associated with commercial tech support services.
- Technicians (interns) help with basic technology troubleshooting, technical questions, and self-guided aid.
- Hardware repair services are available at SDFF's City Heights location.
- Clients may receive recommendations or referrals to SDFF or similar businesses locally in their area.

Supporting Workforce Development:

- Partners with local workforce development programs to utilize participants who are eager to gain hands-on experience through our warehouse computer refurbishing and in-community technical support opportunities.
- Supports the Digital Bridge program while developing the skills of interns in our technical training programs.
- Provides work experience and meets an important community need.
- Helps create a local IT talent pipeline, developing the skills of untapped interns while serving the community.

Low-Cost Computers:

- Known for our Low-Cost Computer Program, participation used to require a visit to our City Heights office.
- Through the Digital Bridge, constituents can now qualify, buy, and receive low-cost computers onsite during workshops.
- The typical cost for laptops is around $150.

Impact and Benefits - Strategic Goals (2025-2029)

- Serve over 3,000 individuals annually through in-community programs
- Surpass 15,000 service hours
- Double the number of host sites countywide
- Expand internships by 50%
- Increase community tech support access by 40%

Partnering with SDFF will drive significant social, economic, and community benefits:

- **Education**: Improved digital skills enhanced educational outcomes, and prepared students for future careers.
- **Employment**: Equip residents with digital skills to fully participate in the economy and open opportunities for employment.
- **Economic Growth**: Boosting the local economy through a tech ready workforce fosters entrepreneurship and opens new opportunities.
- **Social Engagement**: Reduce social isolation and foster community involvement through connectivity and participation.
- **Quality of Life**: Improve access to online resources and services to enhance overall well-being.

Transforming San Diego into a Digital Bridge

SDFF's Digital Bridge program aligns perfectly with the goals communities throughout San Diego County looking to address the challenges of the digital divide. In response to the critical need for digital skills and access, SDFF launched the Digital Bridge program to offer a model that can extend digital equity services throughout San Diego County. Through strategic partnerships and scheduled visits to key host sites, we will provide comprehensive digital skills education, affordable technology, and robust technical support, bridging the digital divide and empowering our community.

This initiative is designed to expand SDFF's services across San Diego County by partnering with key organizations and establishing a network of regularly scheduled visits at specified host sites. This program represents an opportunity for communities to advance digital equity by leveraging SDFF's expertise and proven methods to offer targeted programs to covered populations. Our approach ensures participants gain access to vital technological tools and skills, in turn, fostering a more connected and thriving community. Designed for scalability and sustainability, the Digital Bridge concept will thrive through expanded host sites, increased internships, enhanced training, and deepened community outreach. This framework not only addresses immediate needs but more importantly supports long-term growth and impact.

Together, we can advance digital equity, ensure that all residents have access to technological tools and skills, and thrive through a broadly connected economy and society. Together, we will transform digital barriers into gateways of opportunity, fostering a more inclusive and empowered community.