The "Community Tech Workers": A Community-Driven Model to Support Economic Mobility and Bridge the Digital Divide in the U.S.
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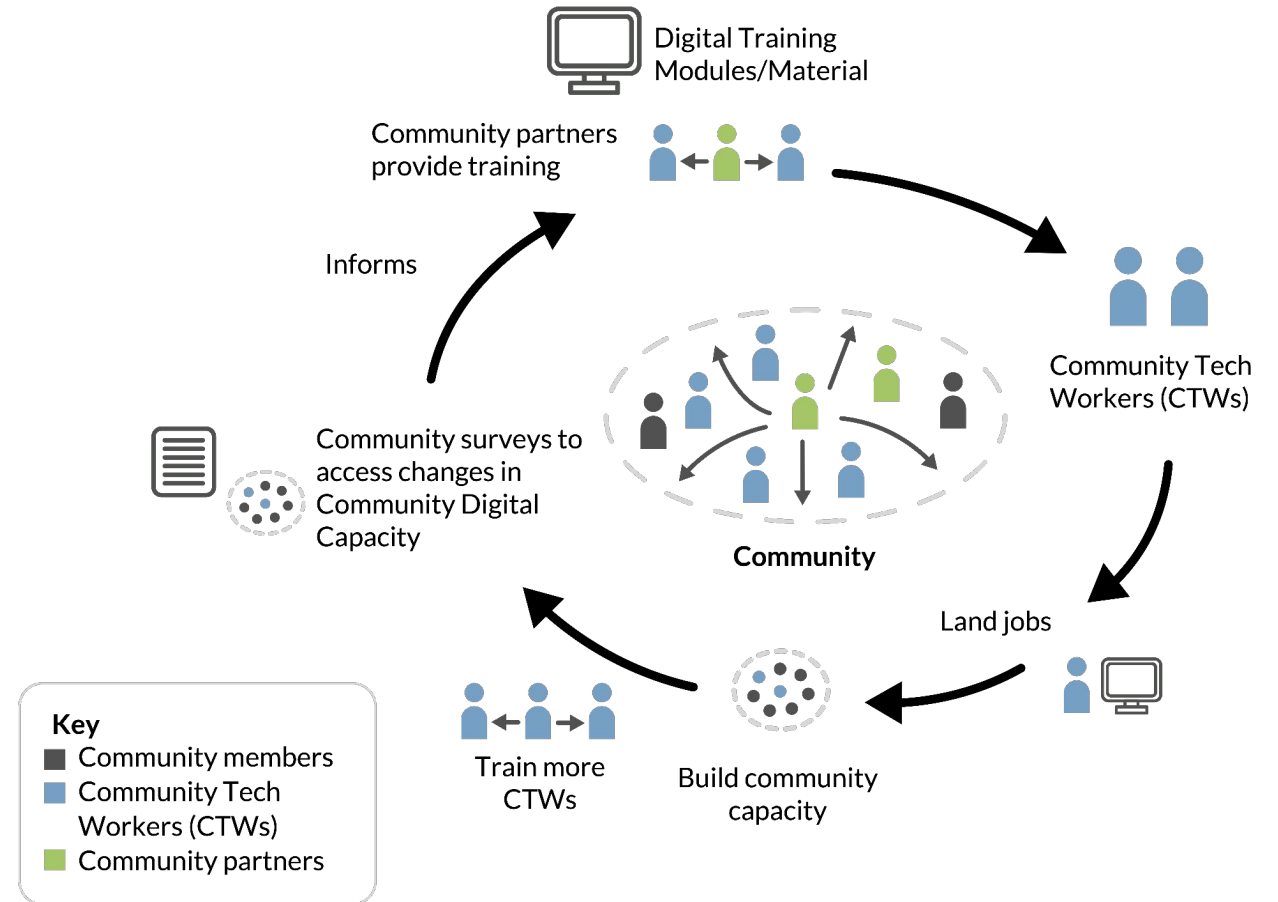- **Kolby Gadd**, UM CEDER

Community Partners

- **Zachary Rowe**, Executive Director, Friends of Parkside (FOP)
- **Angela Pruitt**, Community Tech Worker, FOP
- **Kareem Baig**, Program Manager, Michigan Community Health Workers Alliance (MiCHWA)
- **Porsche Fischer**, former Education and Registry Manager at MiCHWA; Training Manager Community Health Worker Academy at Wayne State University
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Project Overview

Problem Statement

- Digital inequalities in access, use, and self-efficacy reflect offline socioeconomic inequalities and pose a serious threat to today's increasingly tech-reliant society.
- Such inequalities inhibit people from applying for health care and housing benefits, applying for employment, and accessing services like at-home grocery delivery.
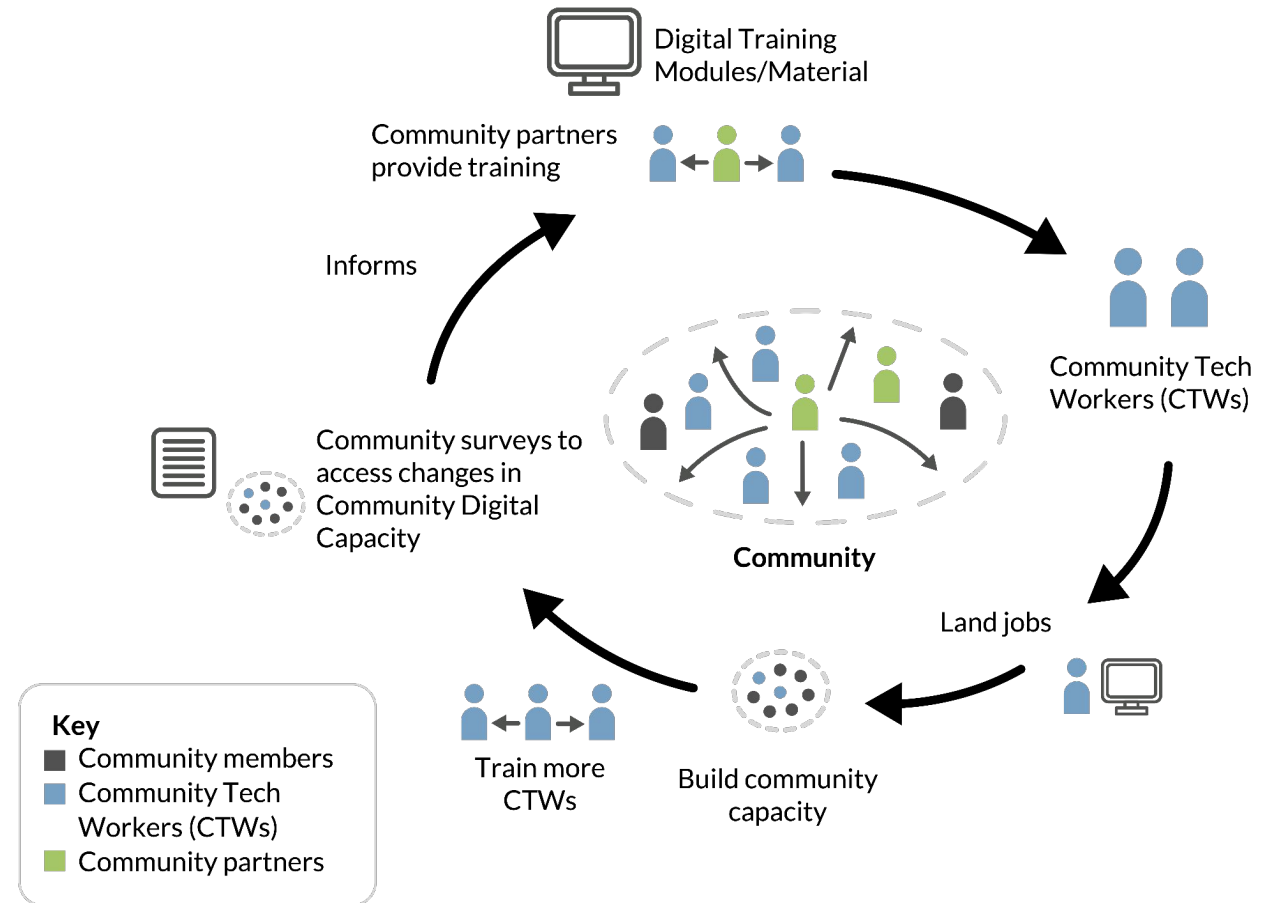

Proposed Work:

The "Community Tech Workers" is a community-driven, "train the trainer" approach that promotes digital literacy in communities. Community tech workers will be lay community members who are trained to meet the digital needs of underserved populations. Our work proposes training CTWs to assess and address the digital needs of the community by guiding members through performing basic digital tasks (setting up health appointments, connecting to loved ones, ordering groceries, securing employment).

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Digital Training Modules/Material

Community partners provide training

Informs

Community surveys to access changes in Community Digital Capacity

Community

Community Tech Workers (CTWs)

Land jobs

Train more CTWs

Build community capacity

Key
- Community members
- Community Tech Workers (CTWs)
- Community partners

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Intellectual Merit:

- A new **measure of community digital capacity** to be used across communities
- Requirements for a scalable and accessible **community-based model** to support digital capacity and economic growth within resource-constrained contexts

Broader Impacts:

- **A community-based model to increase digital literacy** and train workers for upgraded **work opportunities.**
- Results that will inform local and national public policy efforts to improve digital literacy within non-affluent communities

Phase I (Jan 2022 - Dec 2023)	Phase 2: (Sept 2023 - Sept 2024)	Phase 3: (Jan 2024 - Jan 2025)
• First six months: **Develop a measure** to assess community digital capacity • Construct key training materials • First six months: Train 25 CTWs (Detroit)	• **Assess training** • **Assess learning experience** • **Assess impact of CTWs and community digital capacity** • Explore credentialing • Document and assess employment skills	• Capture economic value of CTW model

Project Update

Pilot completion & team ramp up

- Kickoff Meeting with pilot results
- Held first external advisory board and steering committee meetings

Exploratory measure of Community Digital Capacity

- Initial survey design and development
- Cognitive interviews with target community members
- Survey updates and initial deployment (Online and in-person)
- Factorial analysis and initial scoring

CTW training / informed by survey results and employer interviews

- Cultural competencies training should be integrated into CTWs training
- Digital literacy should extend beyond the workplace (finding transportation and filing for unemployment)

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Project Evolution

After reaching out to employers based on advice from our advisory board and steering committee members, we learned the importance of offering other soft skills despite our initial emphasis on technical skills. As a result, we are looking at online tools such as Northstar that offer career skills and more basic literacy skills.

We learned that those who are most likely able to complete surveys online will likely be those most likely to have higher levels of digital capacity. Thus, going forward, we will need to put more effort into deploying our surveys offline.

In terms of recruitment, we'll need to find ways to take into account the Cliff Effect, or what happens when additional funds trigger a disproportionate loss of government assistance. In this case, people could be "pushed off of the cliff" when it comes to benefits. Because we are working with residents of public housing, additional pay could lead to participants becoming ineligible for subsidized benefits like food, housing, and healthcare.

Anticipated outcomes & success measures for next year

Expected Outcome

- 35 trained CTWs (25 in Y1)
- Materials and resources to encourage experiential learning through reflection and peer engagement (Y2)
- Implications for credentialing on-the-job digital proficiency and interpersonal skills (Y2)

Activity

- Determine the content and structure of CTW training (Y1)
- Create materials and resources to support experiential learning (Y2)
- Facilitate co-design workshops with CTWs to identify novel approaches to credentialing experience (Y2)

Successful If …

- 50% of trained CTWs choose to be CTWs for their communities
- Material uploaded to Canvas that is informed by Community Health Workers (and is usable by them)
- Increase in measures of employability