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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Problem Statement

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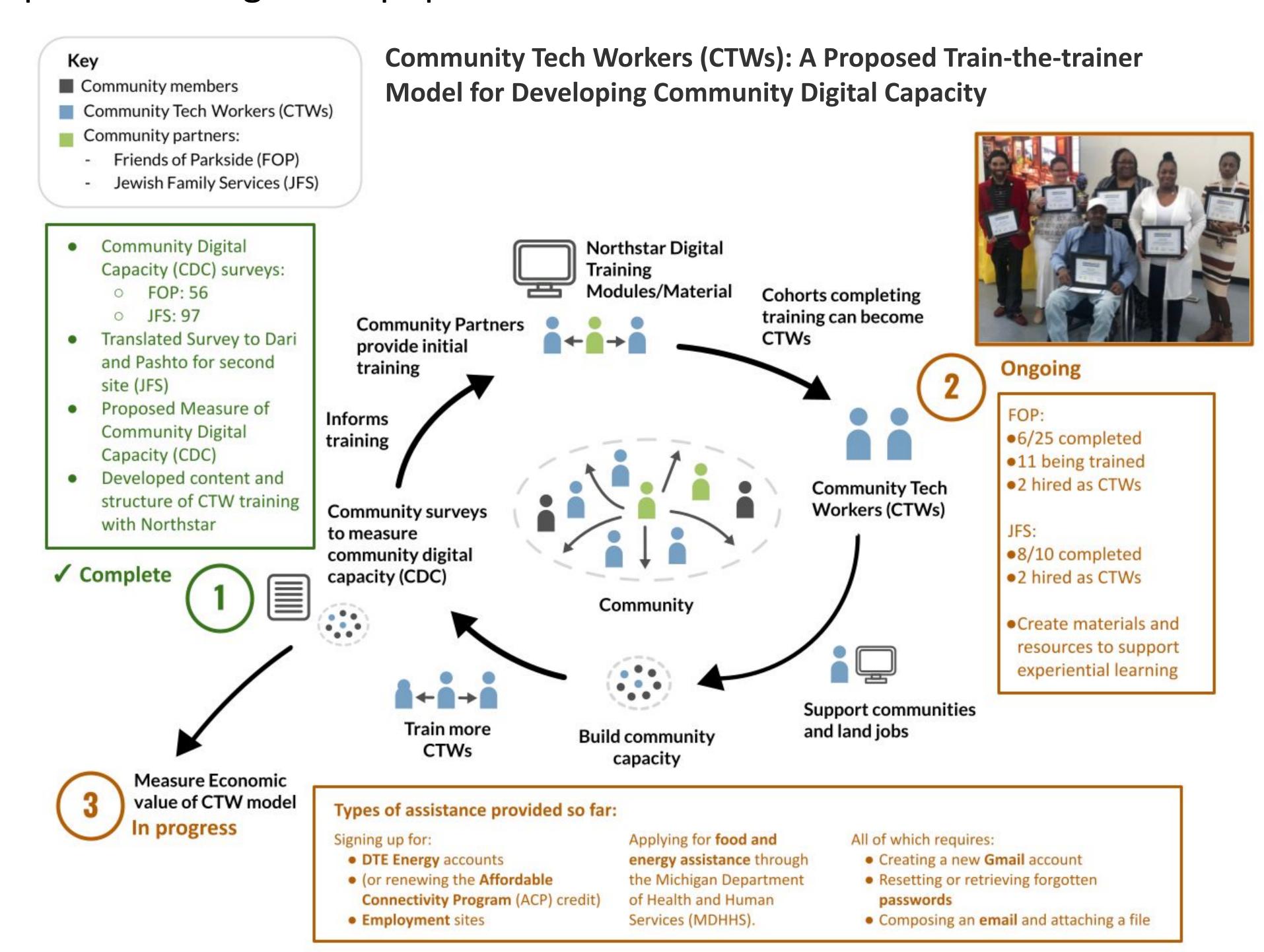
Project Overview

The "Community Tech Workers" (CTWs) 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).

Intellectual Merit

- Requirements for a scalable and accessible community-based model to support digital capacity and economic growth within resource-constrained contexts.
- A new measure of community digital capacity to be used to measure the impact of our model.
- Socio-technical design requirements for community-based gig platforms to operate among wider populations.

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.

Progress thus Far

Phase 1: Developed a measure and identified appropriate training materials via Northstar

- Collected and analyzed 56 surveys of community digital capacity among public housing residents (FOP) and 97 surveys of community digital capacity among Afghan Refugees (JFS)
- Proposed a measure of Community Digital Capacity consisting of 28 items covering three domains— individual, social, and infrastructure (under submission)
- Determined the content and structure of community tech worker training

Phase 2: Training at public housing site (FOP) still in progress. We staggered training over time to account for the initial slow ramp. JFS training completed.

Next Steps and Expected Outcomes

- Complete FOP training.
- Identify credentialing opportunities for on-the-job digital proficiency and interpersonal skills.
- Identify the economic value of our model.
- Plan for future funding.

Visit the Website: umctw.wordpress.com

Community Tech Workers (CTWs): A Proposed Train-the-trainer Model for Developing Community Digital Capacity