Bridging the Digital Divide in Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Communities in the South

THE TEAM!

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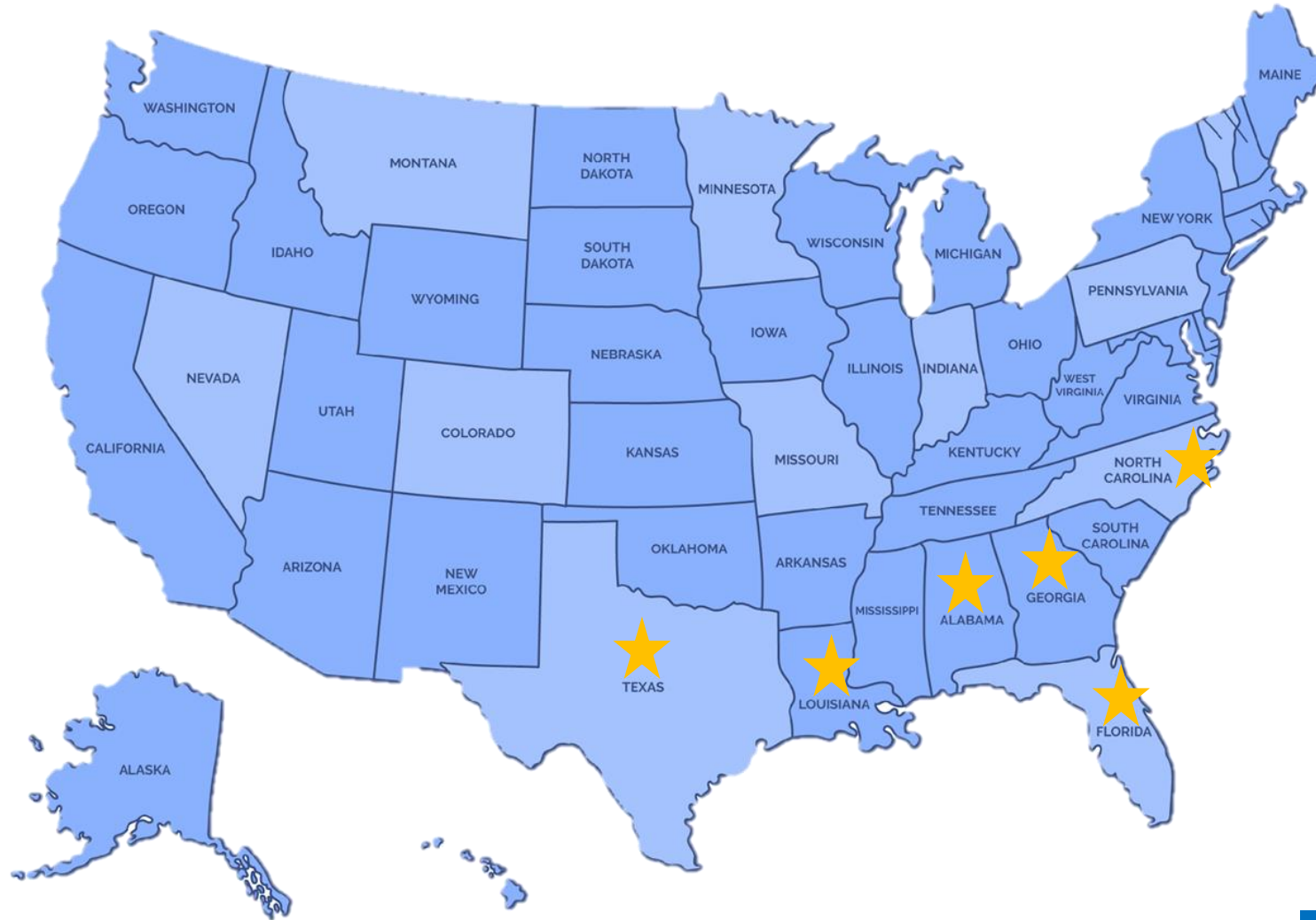Conchita Newman, Florida A&M University

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Our Goal: Increase people's ability to navigate the digital landscape safely and effectively

2022 Digital Skills Survey – 635 Extension Voices

Digital Skills	Percent Ranking in Top Three
Safe and Effective Internet Use	68.4
Computer/Digital Device Basics (hardware and basic software)	63.4
Interacting with Others Online (social media, video-conferencing, file sharing, etc.)	55.8
Personal or Business Finance Online Tools	20.3
Family Health and Communication*	22.4
Career Planning and Job Seeking	22.1
Business & Entrepreneur Management (including ag. businesses)	18.1
Digital Agriculture/Smart Agriculture	17.8
Government/Community Online Interactions	11.7

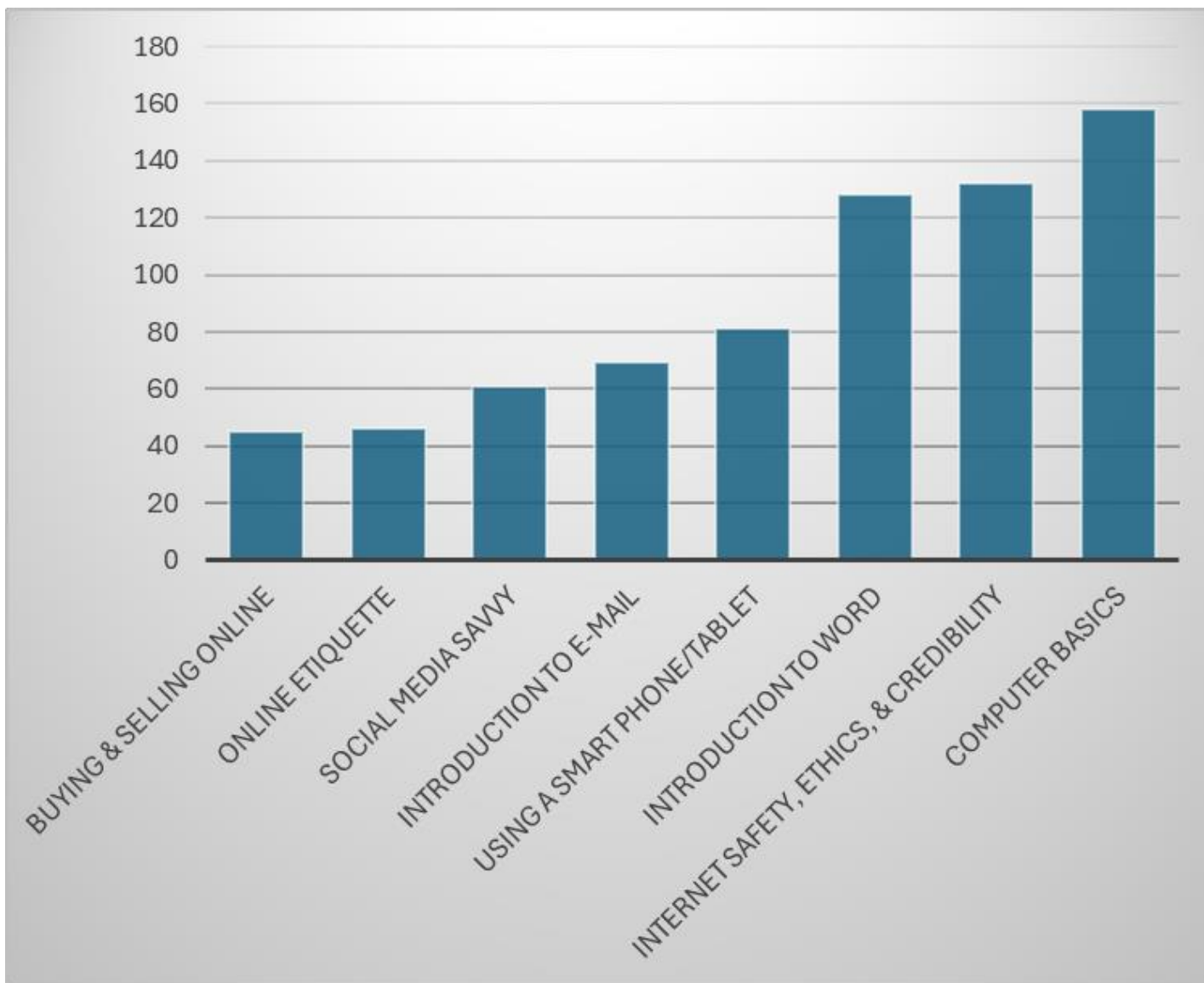* Tied for #3 with Family & Consumer Science Respondents

Digital Inclusion Skills Training Curricula

Curricula developed by 1890 Land-Grant project partners(*) in collaboration with the National Digital Education Extension Team

- Being Social Media Savvy
- Buying and Selling Online
- **Computer Basics***
- **Connecting to Government Resources***
- **Internet Safety, Ethics, and Identifying Credible Sources***
- Internet Safety for Kids
- Introduction to E-Mail: The Power of Digital Communication
- **Introduction to Microsoft Word: A Word Processing Program***
- Netiquette
- Saving, Recovering, and Sharing Data and Files
- **Using a Smart Phone or Tablet***
- **Zoom: A Participant's Guide***
- **Zoom: Host Basics***

Will use information to:

66% - Connect with friends/family/customers.

47% - Find community activities or resources.

44% - Improve my day-to-day happiness.

38% - Express myself through posts, videos, blogs, podcasts, etc.

Alabama

Partnership Strength:

- Big Shiloh Church Family Life Center

- Union Hill Primitive Baptist Church Family Life Center

- Red Bank Missionary Baptist Church Family Life Center

- Bethel Pine Family Life Center

- Boligee Community Center

- Legacy Center
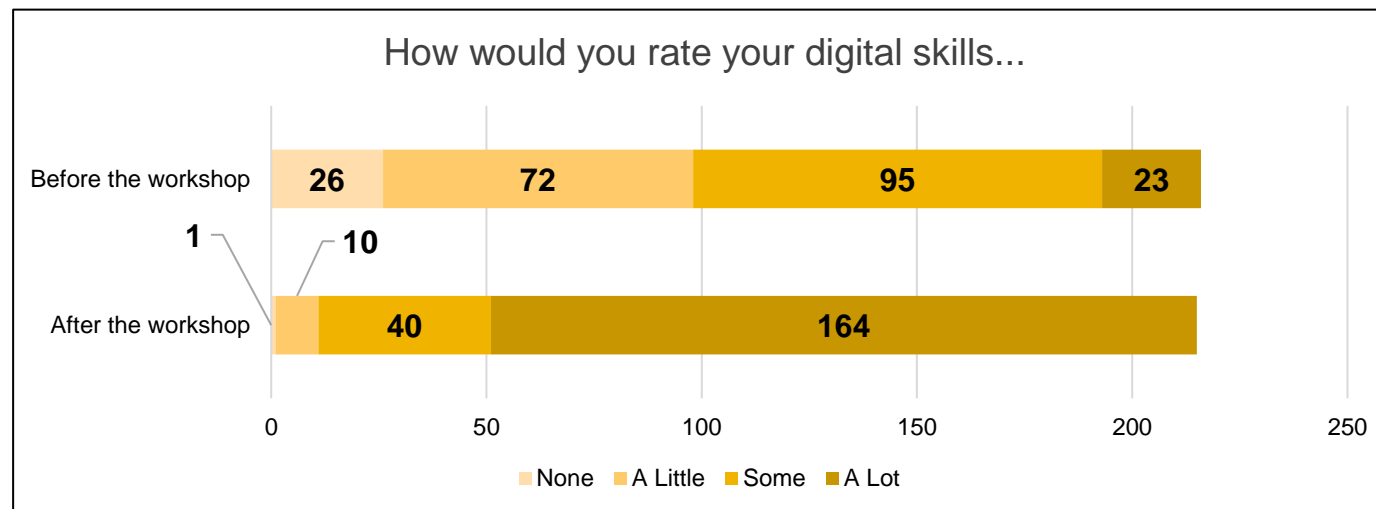
- Bob Harrison Senior Center

Alabama

Community Need – Senior adults in both counties lacked the ability to use digital technologies and information effectively and safely.

Our Response –

- Provided older adults access to laptop computers and Internet.
- Provided hands-on digital literacy workshops on: Computer Basics, Introduction to Word (Parts I and II), Netiquette: Online Etiquette, Smartphones and Tablet Training

Results/Impact – 224 Participants

How would you rate your digital skills...

	None	A Little	Some	A Lot
Before the workshop	26	72	95	23
After the workshop	1	10	40	164

Florida

Partnership Strength:

- Elder Care Community Council of Franklin County, Inc.
- FAMU 4-H Tech Changemakers
- Gadsden County Elder Affairs
- Gadsden County Community Health Council
- Gadsden Wellness
- Smith-Williams Community Service Center/City of Tallahassee

Florida

Community Need

- Limited in-person access to healthcare, governmental/community services and events
- Barriers to telehealth - experience difficulty navigating online healthcare portals
- Lack of familiarity with technology, such as using smartphones or computers, navigating Zoom

Our Response

- Selected and trained 3 Community Digital Navigators
- Partnered with FAMU 4-H Tech Changemakers to assist with the delivery of courses using lessons from the Tech Changemakers Guidebook
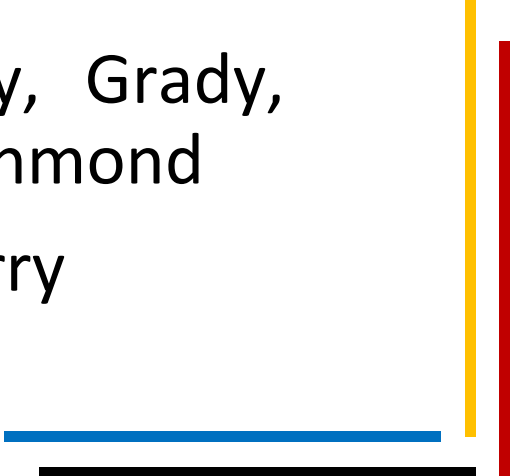
Impacts/ Results

- Cultivated community relationships
- Established 2025 training schedule
- 52 seniors currently enrolled

Georgia

Partnership Strength:

- Funding – AFRI, NTIA and SRDC

- Refurbished Devices – AT&T

- Network Access – Counties: Crawford (2), Peach (4), Macon (2)

- Community Labs – Peach County Youth Excellence, Senior Centers

- Digital Skills Workshops Attendees

  - 8 hours In-person / Laptop Issued: Bibb, Camden, Dooly, Grady, Peach, Houston, Macon, Jones, Lowndes, Madison, Richmond

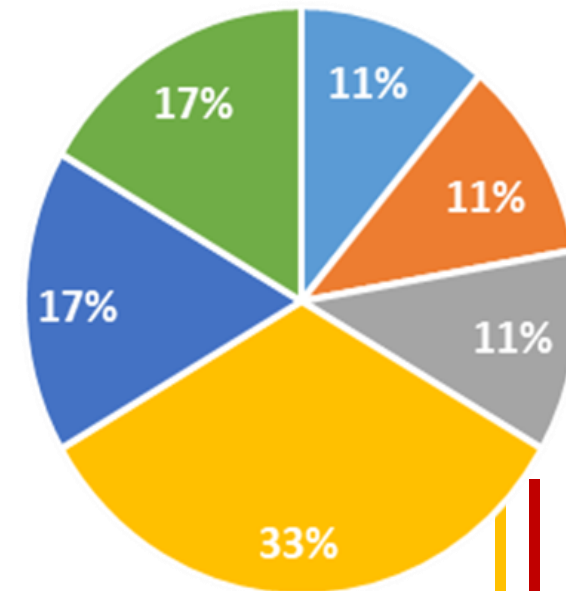 - 2-hours In-person / Multiple sessions: Houston and Perry

Georgia

Community Need - Fort Valley State University Cooperative Extension identified barriers that rural communities face with limited access to a technology infrastructure and digital education.

Our Response – Broadband, a device, digital education, and productivity programs are resources that FVSU provides to support communities.

Results/Impact – Over 200 participants

Since the class, I use the following:

- Attend Online Classes
- Access Government Services
- Access School Website and Students Grades
- Connect on Social Media
- Attend Religious Services
- Attend Medical Appointments

11%
11%
11%
33%
17%
17%

Louisiana

Partnership Strength:
- Southern University Agriculture Research and Extension Center
- Sweet Union Baptist Church

Community Need
- Lack of digital literacy among parish residents
- Unfamiliar with how to access and utilize trustworthy online services
- Limited social media skills
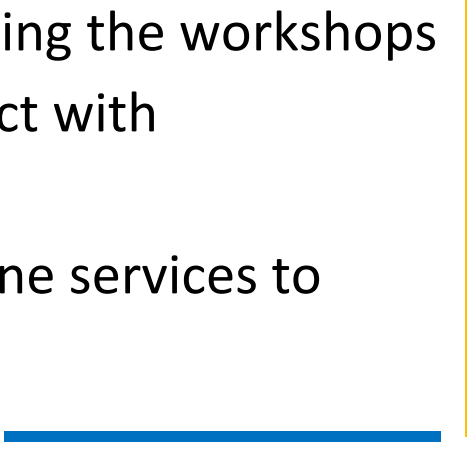- Limited knowledge in how to use email

Louisiana

Our Response

- Hands-on workshops using the participants devices
- Email setup & practice
- Social media basics
- Finding, determining trustworthiness and accessing online resources (local, state and federal government sites)

Results/Impact

- 80% of participants indicated an increase in digital skills after attending the workshops
- 70% of participants plan to use their improved digital skills to connect with friends/family/customers
- 60% of participants indicated that they are more likely to utilize online services to access healthcare/wellness opportunities
- Follow-up digital classes are in development
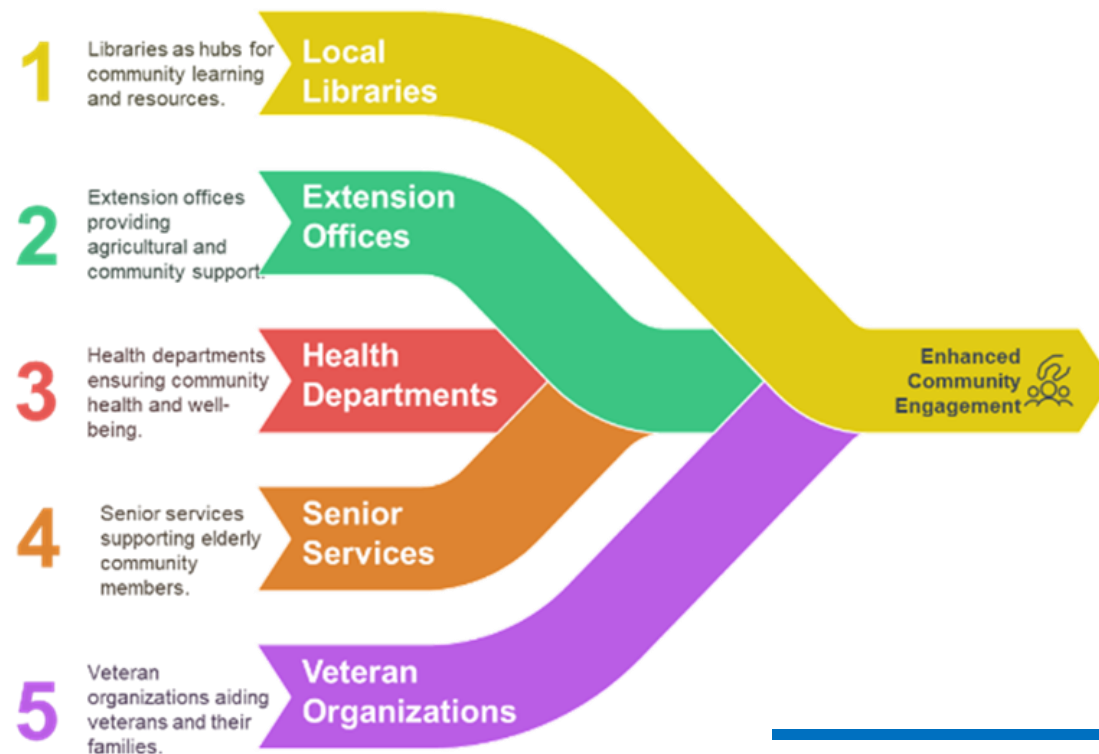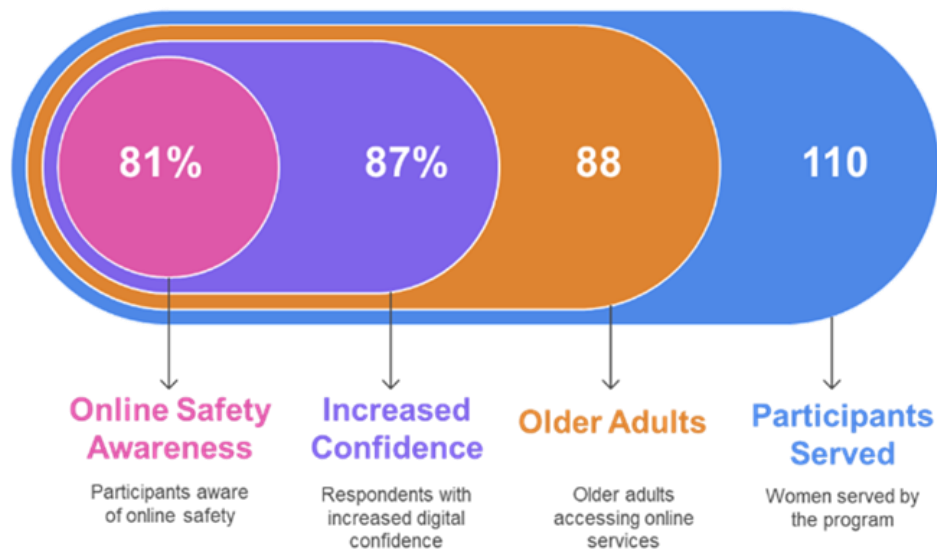
North Carolina

Partnership Strength:

- NC Cooperative Extension (NC State and NC A&T)
- North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT)
- NC Digital Equity and Inclusion Collaborative (NCDEIC)
- Digi-Bridge: Charlotte
- BAND-NC (Building a New Digital Economy in North Carolina)

North Carolina

Strength in partnerships/collaboration

Digital Divide Exists
Communities lack digital access

Community Engagement
Workshops delivered across North Carolina

Skills Training
Digital navigation and safety taught

Digital Inclusion Achieved
Communities have digital skills

Response: Empowering North Carolina Through Digital Skills

Digital Literacy Program Impact

81% — Online Safety Awareness
Participants aware of online safety

87% — Increased Confidence
Respondents with increased digital confidence

88 — Older Adults
Older adults accessing online services

110 — Participants Served
Women served by the program

1. Libraries as hubs for community learning and resources. — **Local Libraries**
2. Extension offices providing agricultural and community support. — **Extension Offices**
3. Health departments ensuring community health and well-being. — **Health Departments**
4. Senior services supporting elderly community members. — **Senior Services**
5. Veteran organizations aiding veterans and their families. — **Veteran Organizations**

Enhanced Community Engagement

Texas

Partnership Strength:

- Prairie View A&M University Extension

- Pharr Chamber of Commerce

- VIVA Organization (supporting the Black community)

Community Need

- Lack of digital literacy among small business owners

- Limited social media skills

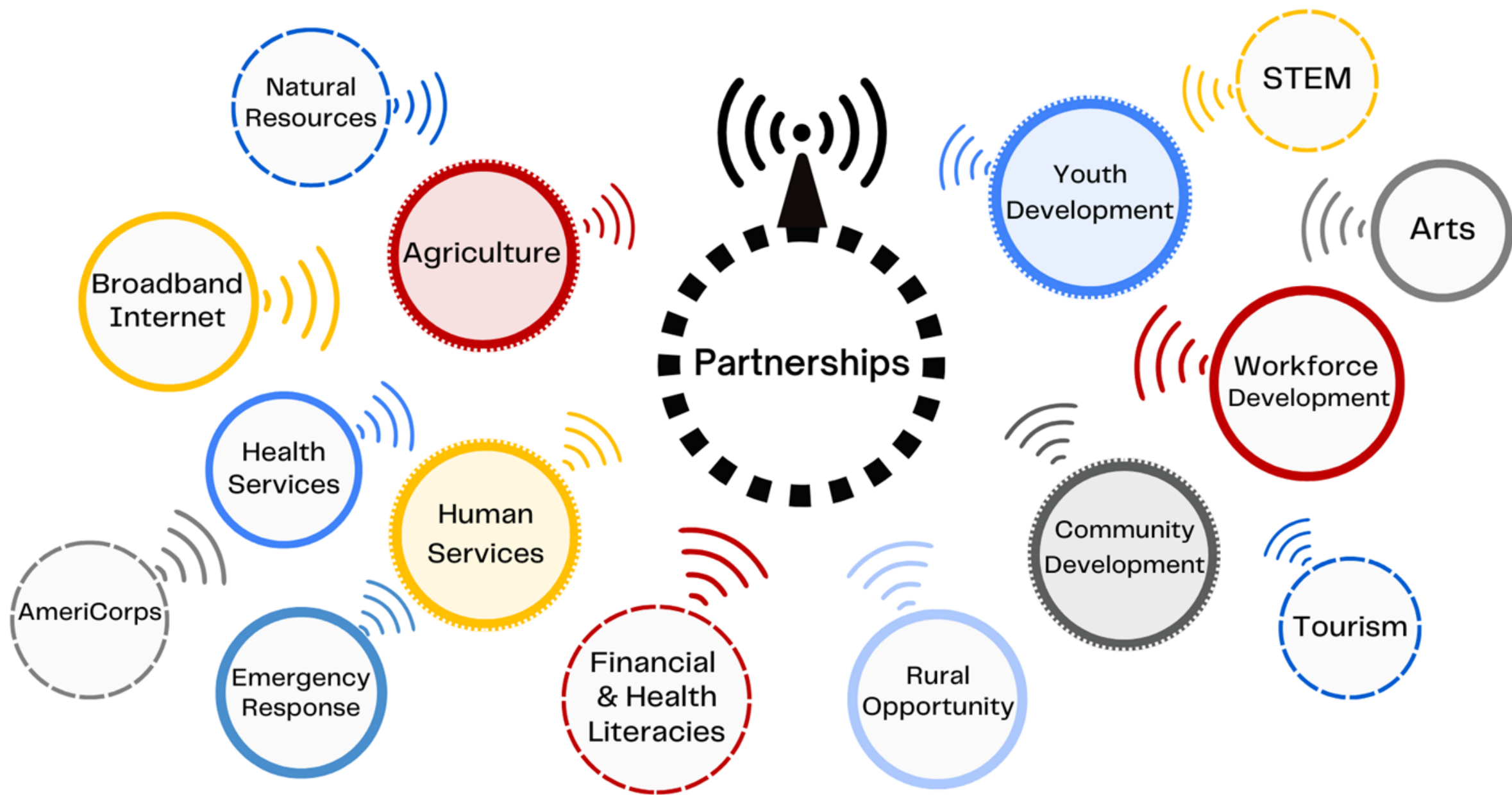- Unfamiliarity with email and online purchasing

Texas

Our Response

- Hands-on workshop using iPads and laptops
- Email setup & practice
- Social media basics (Facebook, Instagram)
- Safe online purchasing & free marketing tools (Canva)

Results/Impact

- 25 participants; majority from Black community
- 100% created business email accounts
- 90% felt more confident using social media
- Follow-up digital bootcamp in development

Connect to Extension Digital Skills Education Resources

- Digital Skills Lessons
- Evaluation Tools
- Curriculum Toolkit
- Program Guidebook
- Broadband Planning Resources

Join National Digital Education Extension Team (NDEET)

Contact For More Information:

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