STORY TAPESTRIES

Digital Solutions that Bridge the Divide

Summary Results, 2022-2023

August 2023

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August 2023

Program Background

As the world continues to adjust to living with COVID, communities are adjusting to the expanding digital landscape. People that were already behind technologically are now even further behind, yet the expectation to understand tech-based concepts as well as have consistent access to technological tools such as a computer and internet continues to grow. Story Tapestries' **Digital Solutions that Bridge the Divide** (Digital Equity project) addresses the gap in access to tools, resources, and knowledge about the digital skills required to succeed in today's workforce. Digital Solutions works with black, brown, and indigenous community members 16 years and older who are experiencing economic hardship and wish to expand their income-earning potential and/or create deeper community connections through digital literacy. The project launched in September 2022 with two components, a Digital Fundamentals course and Tech Savvy Soundbytes informational videos, which are free for all participants. Participants also had the opportunity to take part in two field trips to local businesses to see digital skills in action in a workplace.

Tech-Savvy Soundbytes are YouTube videos featuring guest speakers who share practical skills and personal stories about how technology impacts their work life, helped them find work/education opportunities, or supported their ability to become an entrepreneur. These engagements build awareness, interest, and initial skills in utilizing digital tools such as photography, videography, and software for editing and publishing a digital portfolio. Videos are made available on YouTube on Story Tapestries' Channel and on a dedicated Playlist.

Digital Fundamentals is a course designed to support community members in building their own digital portfolio using the tools that work best for them. Generally speaking, digital fundamentals includes a series of 2-hour sessions, followed by a one-on-one coaching session. A mentor guides participants throughout, supporting course graduates as they develop their own digital portfolio. Mentors are recruited from community partner organizations. Participants learn to use a computer and email; conduct research/job searches; use video recording and streaming equipment; be compelling/engaging in recorded or live videos; use software to curate an online presence; market themselves and build a digital portfolio; and leverage a digital portfolio to access educational and work opportunities. Graduates have priority access to an equipment loaning library and connected with businesses and individuals in our vast network of partners to explore new work opportunities. Trainers use an arts-based and inclusive teaching approach with a racial equity lens to engage every type of learner.

In 2022-23, Story Tapestries ran the project at four sites, including two Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) sites (one in Silver Spring and one in Wheaton), the Montgomery Village Foundation for Seniors, and the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH). At the LAYC and MCCH sites, 18 sessions were provided along with two digital field trips. Story Tapestries ran 10 workshops and two in-house field trips at the Montgomery Village Foundation. In total, 235 community members engaged with the Tech-Savvy Soundbytes workshops available on YouTube. In addition, 60 individuals participated in the Digital Fundamental workshops, with all 60 individuals completing the program.

Evaluation Methods

To support the evaluation of this initiative, Story Tapestries engaged Sharp Insight LLC, an external evaluation firm. The project evaluation outcomes included:

(1) 300+ community members will engage in Tech-Savvy Soundbytes workshops, available on YouTube and potentially on public access TV. *[Result: Not Met, 235 community members]*

(2) 45 individuals will participate in a digital tools skills training course, Digital Fundamentals, including nine 2-hour workshops held between September 2022 and May 2023 and coaching from June – August 2023. *[Result: MET, 60 participants]*

(3) 90% of Digital Fundamentals registrants will complete the program and receive a certificate of completion. *[Result: MET, 100% registrants completing the program]*

(4) 80% of Digital Fundamentals graduates will prepare a digital portfolio within 3 months of course completion to support their efforts to identify new work or educational opportunities, including potentially launching their own business. *[Result: MET, 97%]*

(5) 80% of Digital Fundamentals graduates will report moderate to significant improvements in their competency and confidence in using technology. *[Result: MET, 97%]*

The evaluation team developed three key evaluation tools, including:

A **participant workshop survey** to assess the extent to which skills are learned/gained and capture social identity. This survey obtained 37 respondents over the year. Of these, 53% reported taking part in the Personal Brand workshop, 33% in the Photography workshop, 6% in a Story Tapestries workshop, 3% (or one person) in the Job Interview workshop, and two were unknown.

A **focus group moderator's guide for participants and staff** to capture key successes and suggestions for improvement. Seven discussion groups were carried out with 28 participants, of which four groups included staff/organizations and four groups included participants/clients.

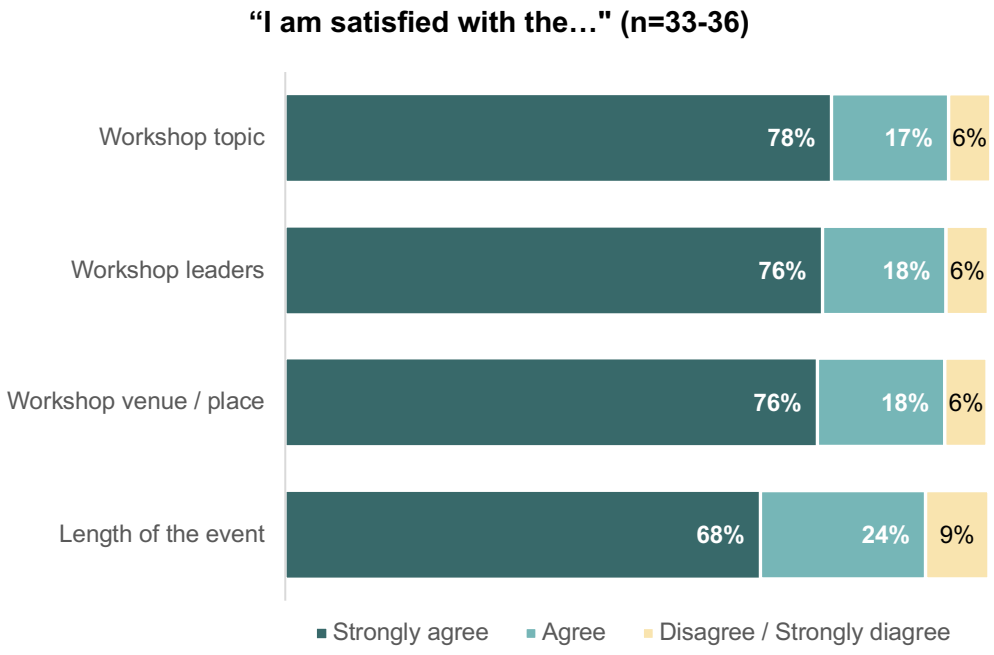
Teacher/fellow workshop summary form to capture process measures, feedback, and stories/examples of program impact. Five summary forms were filled out following a workshop, representing workshops with 17 participants. Given the small number of respondents, data from these forms were incorporated into the full report, as applicable.

The following report provides a summary of the Digital Equity evaluation findings, including program satisfaction, outcomes, and recommendations.

Satisfaction with Digital Equity Workshops

Workshop participants were surveyed about their satisfaction with aspects of the workshops. Three-quarters or more strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the workshop topic, workshop leaders and workshop venue. Over two-thirds strongly agreed they were satisfied with the length of the event. Very few participants were not satisfied with any of these aspects.

97% **of workshop participants said they would recommend the Story Tapestries workshop (n=35)**



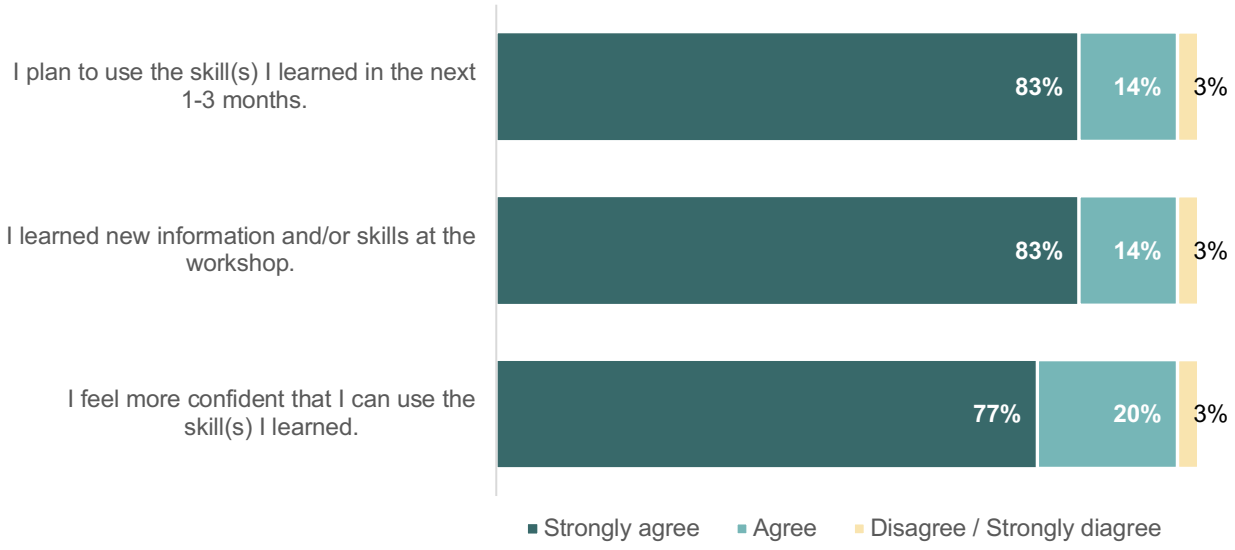
Digital Equity Program Impacts on Participants

Participant Perspectives on Impacts: Survey Respondents

On their exit surveys, participants were asked about the impacts of taking part in the workshops. All but one respondent agreed with the three outcome statements, including that they planned to use the skills learned within the next 1-3 months, that they learned new information and/or skills at the workshop, and they felt more confident that they could use the skills they learned.

97% of workshop participants said they were more confident they could use the skills learned and learned new information and/skills, **exceeding the performance measure of** 80% of graduates reporting improvements in their competency and confidence in using technology.

"How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Story Tapestries workshop?" (n=35-36)



97% of workshop participants said they plan to use the skills they learned in the next 1-3 months, **exceeding the performance measure of** 80% of graduates using the program to support their efforts to identify new work or educational opportunities.

Participant Perspectives on Most Useful Activities from Focus Groups

During the four Digital Equity focus groups, project participants were asked, “What program activities did you find most helpful or useful?” Participant comments were positive in nature and most often mentioned was the program’s headshot activity. Participants reported that they enjoyed learning about different photography techniques and how they can use their photography knowledge to enhance their social media profiles which can lead to employment opportunities. One participant even mentioned that they received a job offer after the program assisted them with their social media profile, while two others mentioned they received job offers because of what they learned in the project. Participants also reported that the program staff were very helpful and kind.



“The teaching artists made a comfortable, safe space to learn and share and genuinely cared about the participants' growth and success.”

“Learned dark and plain, light and standout, contrast. I see how you can use it in real life, photography.”

“The opportunity to create a LinkedIn profile. It led to job opportunities and connections.”

“All of the programs: All been professional and well attended. It was nice to see something that otherwise hasn’t existed.”

“We loved how she set up the photos and when she took photos of us as well as showing us how to take photos. We had so much fun. We loved that session.”

Participant Perspectives on Activities: Survey Respondents

Workshop participants were also asked what they enjoyed most about the workshop in their surveys. Instructors were mentioned by the highest number of participants, with participants noting that the instructors care and are relatable. Using the cameras was mentioned by five participants, and three participants each mentioned the job interview process, the branding and logo discussion, learning new things, and people telling their stories.

What was Enjoyed Most about the Workshop	Number of times mentioned (n=29)
Instructors care and are relatable/interaction with instructors	9
Hands on with cameras (using it and how to use it)	5
Job interview process	3
Branding and logo discussion	3
Learned new things	3
People telling stories/talking	3
Inclusive / professional environment	2
Everything	1
Body language discussion	1
Information on building resume	1

"Each session I learn new ways to approach personal branding."

"[I] learned about how social media can impact you and how you can't erase what's online."

"The fact that even a small group could produce such an enlightening experience was what I enjoyed the most."

Staff Perspective about Impacts from Focus Groups

In the four staff focus groups, participants were asked an open-ended question, “How has Story Tapestries made a difference to your participants?” Overall, the comments about the project’s impact were positive in nature. Facilitators noted that the program provided access to tools and an outlet that they would normally be out of reach for participants. They also noted that the program provided a creative outlet for participants and the teaching artists were very helpful and kind.

Staff mentioned that the participants really valued the professional headshots, reporting that it positively influenced how participants thought about professional appearances. Another activity that made a positive impression was teaching participants how to leverage their social media to do work. Staff mentioned that they saw a shift in how participant’s perceived professional and academic opportunities.



“Our youth come from low-income communities and are able to engage in a workshop that enables them to utilize tools and a different outlook that their community doesn’t provide. It gives them an opportunity. It gives them access to a creative way of thinking. Access could summarize the entire program.”

“The work provided a creative outlet and gave them access to tools and experiences.”

“They gained not only a professional shot to use for future work opportunities. But they learned that they could take professional photos as she talked about how a background or your expression within a photo tells a lot about a person. They actually had a lot of fun doing that and it was fun to watch, and they have really good pictures.”

“They also learned about how people look and see them as they present themselves.”

“We are more educated in using our cellphones and more digitally savvy.”

Participant Perspective about Impacts from Focus Groups

In the four focus groups, Digital Equity project participants were asked, “How has Story Tapestries made a difference to you?” Comments from participants were generally positive. For example, some participants mentioned how they received job offers, decided to go back to school, and successfully asked for a raise at their job because of what they learned from the program. In addition, one facilitator noted that using art as a stress reliever and coping skill was a key-takeaway. Similarly, another facilitator noted that participants felt like they learned how to use technology in a creative way and that that had gained a stronger understanding of their phone.



“We learned from and rooted for each other.”

“We are speaking to each other more, outside of class.”

“The program taught us to 'get off our butts' and make things happen, rather than sitting around waiting for things to happen."

“I learned about things that are dark and plan, things that are bright and stand out. In the process of learning all of that I learned about contrast, it helped me understand my writing more.”

“Photography showed me how to see things through a different lens. It can help you see what you like to capture with your own eyes.”

“The program opened my ideas and visions to photography. Photos are not just selfies, not simple plain jane. I learned how the digital media can be used in any situation.”

“As a result of the digital program, [I am] now highly educated [on] my iPhone.”

Digital Equity Program Impacts on Organizations and Staff

Staff Perspective: Impact on Organization or Organizational Staff

In the four focus groups including staff, participants were asked an open-ended question, “How has Story Tapestries made a difference to organization or its staff?” Staff mentioned they enjoyed watching the participants learn from the program, and that the program alleviated their stress as teachers and coordinators with regards to programming. Staff also mentioned an increase in connection between participants and teachers as they did art together. In addition, staff reported that the partnership, specifically the collaboration opportunities between program staff and teachers, was very impactful as program staff were able to help teachers create and provide different learning opportunities for participants.



“Staff joining the youth in the classes makes a difference.”

“While taking the PD and getting the opportunity to do the art with the student created a connection between the student and teachers.”

“The most impactful was when we conjoined our forces to bring multiple partnership opportunities strengthened the program and for youth.”

“…being able to do photography in different environments I think played an impact in the way that they were able to enjoy it as opposed to doing it in like a small room. It's not to say that our rooms are small but just something about being outside of the space is important.”

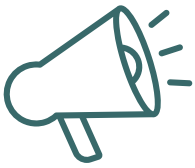
“I think it brings to life so give the staff the opportunity to test run going outside but it impacted the kids and the youth together.”

Additionally, on the Workshop Summary Form, staff were asked an open-ended question, “What are some success stories from this event?” Responses included that, “*It inspired me to get a camera*,” “*We saw new photos from the event*,” and “*Career*.”

Suggestions for Program Improvement

Staff Suggestions for Program Improvement from Focus Groups

In the four staff focus groups, participants were asked, “How can Story Tapestries improve to make a bigger impact on those who take part in their projects?” Staff had many recommendations to improve the program. Most often mentioned was having a consistent schedule and being more strategic about the classes and timing to ensure that the participants had access to necessary resources and/or materials. For example, staff mentioned that mapping out the program over the entire year would be more effective. Facilitators noted that staff would like more professional development workshops and that staff and program leaders should work together to advertise the program. In addition, staff suggested that program leaders have office hours that would allow participants additional one-on-one support when needed. With regard to the program leader’s engagement with participants, staff suggested that the program leaders jump into the activities sooner, as the participants lose interest during long introductory lectures.



“Be more strategic about the classes. And add the PD’s back in for the staff.”

“Incorporating the staff, when possible, in creating art.”

“[Make] scheduling more strategic so that it is easier more consistent.”

“Do an info session earlier.”

“Would love in the future for them [the participants] to learn how to make music and do other art forms. For those students interested, it would be great to find a way to help them professionally develop in the arts and music world.”

“Staff needs a better understanding of the scope of the program.”

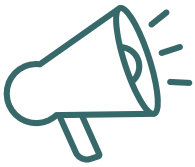
“[It would be] helpful if we jump into the activity or purpose faster, there was too much talking before the main experience happened and sometimes the kids got lost in the process.”

Staff Suggestions from the Workshop Summary Form

Of the five staff responses to the Workshop Summary Form, two included suggestions. These were to have *“more participants and more fun moments”* and *“more cameras.”*

Participant Suggestions for Program Improvement from Focus Groups

Participants provided many recommendations to improve Story Tapestries in the focus groups as well. Most mentioned was having more sessions and having sessions on different days of the week so that if a participant missed one day, they could attend another day. With regards to program topics and activities, participants mentioned more professional development opportunities. For example, facilitators noted increasing the program's focus on job placements experience, job matching opportunities, and job certification programs. Participants also wanted more job interview skills and advice on money management. Lastly, participants suggested that the program include more activities that focus on managing your emotions and workplace skills.



"It would be great if we could continue the program and have more sessions."

"Maybe we could plan a job or career fair field trip as part of the program."

"More opportunities to develop personal branding."

"More opportunities for managing your emotions."

Wish it was several days in a week instead of 1 day a week because often [we] may not be here due to other commitments."