Neighborhood
Tech Help

Program Model

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HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

The **Neighborhood Tech Help Program Model** is intended to support the staff of a community anchor institution to plan their own NTH program) by sharing guidance, tools, and best practices that allow your team to plan for a hyper-local tech support initiative that bridges the digital divide in your community.

We recommend that you review this document in its entirety before reading through our other resources. This program model evolved from best practices and the experience of others across North America. We advise that you do similar comparative research to find the program model that works best for you and your community.

This document is organized to provide you with a starting point based on program development and implementation in New York City. Take what works for you and leave what doesn't.

NTH PROGRAM MODEL OVERVIEW

Neighborhood Tech Help program model offers free, easy-to-access, one-on-one tech support for community members to help them become more comfortable using tech devices, connecting to the internet, setting up online accounts, and improving their tech skills.

This project came about through the NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) commitment to ensuring that all the households supported by the agency's rental assistance subsidies or that live in HPD-assisted affordable housing developments have free or low-cost access to the internet, as well as the skills and confidence to leverage the internet and technology to improve their socioeconomic status.

In order to support a digital shift in Section 8 paperwork processing, HPD, the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), the New York Public Library (NYPL), and The Queens Borough Public Library (QPL) collaborated to initiate a program called Neighborhood Tech Help (NTH)–launched officially in spring 2025–which provides NYC residents, including Section 8 households, individualized support resolving challenges in using technology and the internet.

The program supports the hiring of local young adults as part-time staff (Tech Corps members) who are trained to deliver ad-hoc technical support to a diverse range of New Yorkers in-person at centrally-located community sites.

The NTH initiative launched with the intention of overcoming three primary barriers for local residents to feel more confident bridging the digital divide.

BARRIER	STRATEGY
Hard-to-reach communities	Offer one-on-one, targeted, and hyper-local digital support Deploy creative, hyper-local outreach messaging and strategy to promote and engage skeptical residents Recruit and hire community members to be credible messengers to build relationships local residents
Lack of confidence & basic digital literacy skills and needs	Build confidence, increased interest, and capacity among local residents when it comes to digital literacy skills Provide access to and rationale for digital resources (such as online banking, bill payments, housing applications, etc.)
The perception of online safety	Through one-on-one consultation, support residents' confidence and perceived safety in using the internet and digital devices for day-to-day tasks Create a welcoming environment of trust between the Tech Corps and residents at each community location

NTH PROGRAM MODEL

Informed by research from ideas42 that "residents face many hassles in attending in-person and online programs" offered by libraries and other brick-and-mortar community institutions, the Neighborhood Tech Help (NTH) program was designed based on a need in the community. You're here because you've identified a similar need.

IDENTIFYING TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Your target audience should reflect the goals of your tech help program. A broad "for everyone" approach is less effective than focusing on those who will benefit most-such as communities facing a significant digital divide or challenges with online systems like social service applications.

Define your catchment area. Set geographic boundaries, and determine whether you'll serve one or multiple neighborhoods (i.e., county, parish, or community board). Clarify *who* you're trying to reach and *why*.

Use demographic data (such as the census, the American Community Survey), or local statistics-along with firsthand knowledge to build a snapshot of your audience's age, technology use, and needs. In NYC, such data is available through the Departments of Health and City Planning; identify similar sources in your area.

This example of demographic data was collected for a specific NYC neighborhood to help planners refine language support and assess technology access and comfort. The more accurate and detailed your data, the more successful your program will be. Ground your planning in evidence-use data, not assumptions.

Household Demographics

Elderly	Disabled	Elderly + Disabled	Children	Extremely Low Income	Very Low Income	Low Income	Over 80% AMI
18%	25%	9%	40%	80%	15%	6%	0%

Languages Spoken

Written + Spoken English	Written English only	Spoken English only	No English
80%	5%	3%	8%

Internet Access / Digital Literacy

Are you able to access the internet?

- 60% of the respondents have access to the internet

Devices(s) you use to access the internet?

No device (does not access internet)	Laptop	Tablet	Smartphone	Flip phone	Other
20%	24%	14%	54%	14%	Desktop (2x)

DATA TO CONSIDER

Demographics & Background

Understand who your audience is

- Age range
- Education level
- Primary language(s)
- Employment status and occupation
- Income level (if relevant for access or affordability)

Technology Access & Usage

Identify the tools and barriers participants face

- Devices they own or can access (i.e.., smartphone, laptop, tablet, etc.)
- Internet access (home, mobile, public Wi-Fi, etc.)
- Frequency of technology use (daily, weekly, rarely)
- Typical uses of technology (communication, social media, job search, education, etc.)
- Comfort level with digital tools

Community & Cultural Context

Design content that feels relevant and trusted

- Cultural or community norms around technology
- Trusted messengers or organizations
- Local resources and partnerships
- Community challenges or strengths

SERVICE DELIVERY

The NTH program model follows **a drop-in office hours structure hosted at one or more locations central and convenient** for target community participants. The priority should be choosing locations where there is a 'captive audience,' strategically selecting places where people already gather and, when possible, have consistent foot traffic. Host sites, participants, and other factors will vary. The following aspects of the tech help session should serve as a starting point. Set up protocols should be established between the institutions and the host sites.

Set-Up

- Designated area for participants to wait and complete intake forms
- Designated area to conduct tech support sessions with participants
- On-site equipment and technology
- Tablets and/or laptops with access to Windows, MacOS, Android, and iOS
- Portable printer for distributing on-demand handouts for participants–NOT intended for participant us
- Wayfinding and signage in appropriate languages to promote services and help participants navigate the site

Staffing and Scheduling

- Consistent schedule at host site(s) to be pre-determined in the planning phase
- A two-person Tech Corps team model in place:
    - To ensure Tech Corps members' safety
    - For backup on challenging tech issues
    - To support the engagement of waiting participants and drum up interest from passersby
    - Tech Corps members can welcome and engage with participants, while the other provides one-on-one support
- Tech Corps members that speak primary demographic language
    - Each institution should have a language interpretation plan in place that Tech Corps members can use when they encounter a language with which they're unfamiliar

BEST PRACTICES FROM THE FIELD

Booking appointments. Have participants complete a Tech Support Request Ticket that allows Tech Corps members to plan ahead to meet the participants' needs and ensure they have the tools required to address issues. Requests can be placed over the phone, via text, or using an online form or email. For examples, see:

Drexel University's Digital Navigators

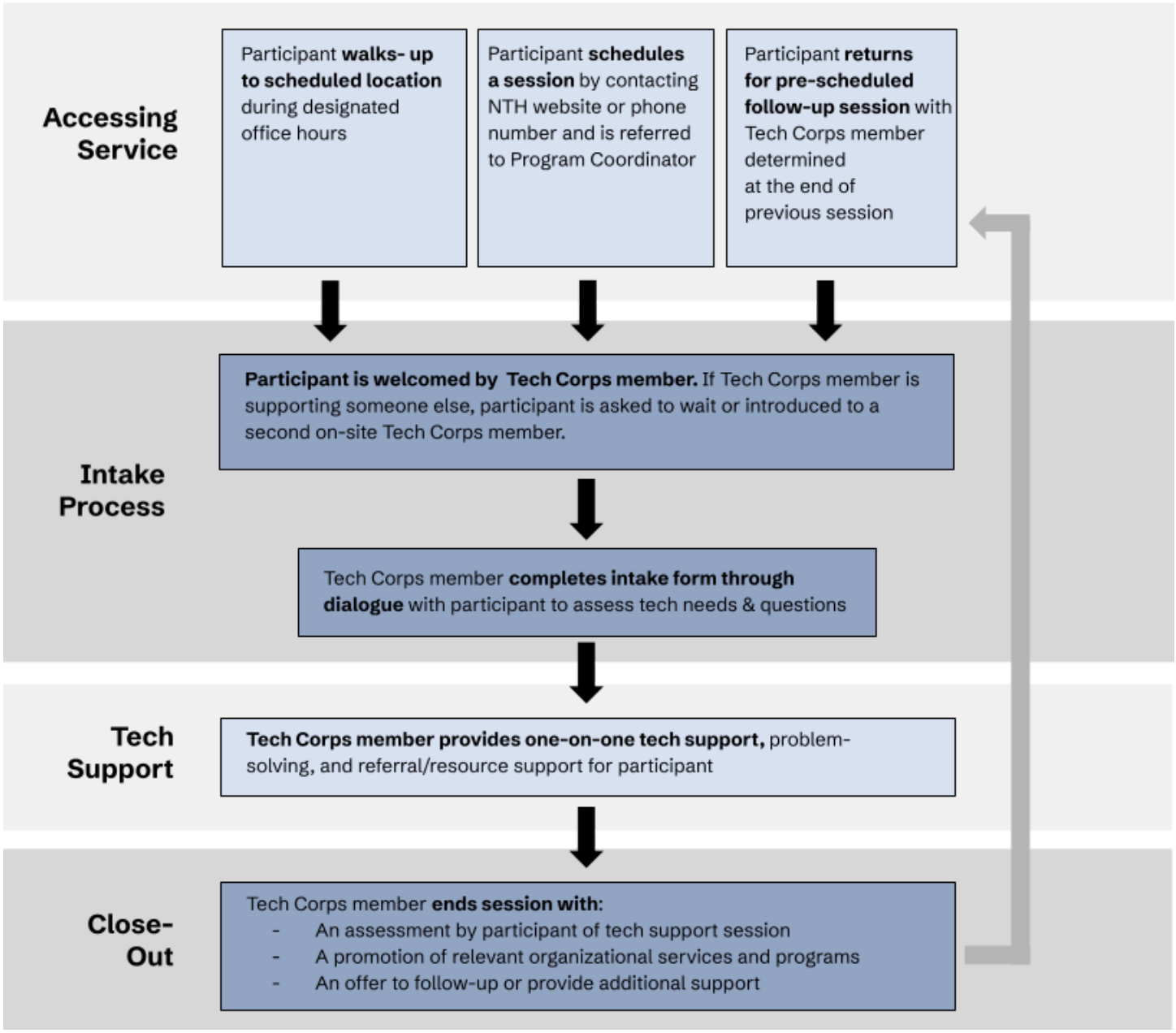
Digital Charlotte

Alternate methods of support. Provide some homebound residents with support via phone or video conference by considering the following:

- Once a week hold an on-site session at the institution to provide support by phone or video
- Video conferencing requires additional support to ensure participants are equipped to use the platform

Participant Flow

The following is a general flow of how participants access and receive NTH services



INTAKE

ACCESSING SERVICES

Walk up

Using a walk-up model for tech support services means that anchor institutions can establish a regular office hours-like schedule, where a table is set up in a designated space. Interested participants will be able to approach during a consistent, scheduled time to request assistance from Tech Corps members.

Schedule a Session

In addition to dropping in for tech support, there are two optional ways that a participant might schedule a Tech Corps session in advance:

- Call an existing hotline or chat service–if in practice–to express interest in getting tech support and be referred (using a predetermined script designed by each anchor institution) to the Tech Corps Coordinator who can book a time during the designated drop-in times at the nearest host site, or
- Schedule a follow-up session with a Tech Corps member at the conclusion of their visit.
- In either instance, it is important that whatever virtual booking system is used (i.e., Calendly, Google Calendar, etc.) by the anchor institution also needs to be accessible to both the person making the appointment and the Tech Corps members.

INTAKE PROCESS

To support long-term relationship-building with participants throughout the program, each participant should be welcomed into the space and greeted with an intake process that will:

- Take no longer than five minutes
- Be completed by the Tech Corps member when a participant expresses interest in service; this dialogue is an essential part of building trust and rapport with NTH participants. The goal is not to hand someone a form but to interview them about their needs and tech experience.
- Be completed digitally for follow-up and data tracking purposes
- A basic intake form should be developed during the planning phase. Print and digital versions of the form should be provided in the appropriate language(s).

BEST PRACTICES FROM THE FIELD (cont.)

Session Length. Research indicates that the ideal length for an effective meeting is 30 minutes. (See Salt Lake City Digital Navigators Toolkit & Digital Navigators of the Hudson Valley). Anchor institutions can determine how they will designate the length of a single session.

Flexibility is key. It's necessary to stay flexible, patient, and open-minded. We recommend having a back-up or pivot plan to support changes to the course of the pilot such as adding small group sessions, providing office hours at existing events like street fairs, or changing locations mid-pilot, etc.

Participant Code of Conduct. Offer a clear set of expectations for participants and Tech Corps members, alike. For example:

- Descriptions of requests that NTH can help with
- Privacy assurances
- Guidelines for the amount of time allowed per session

FORMAT OF A SESSION

In this drop-in model, a participant would arrive with a specific technology need. This is the model that NTH uses for every session regardless of the tech request. Each community anchor institution should determine the appropriate length of a session.

Intake

A welcome and introduction

An intake dialogue to assess participant needs and tech questions

Tech support session

An agreement of the participant's boundaries around their device(s) (i.e., Can the Tech Corps member handle the participant's phone?)

Share NTH's measures around privacy protection and its liability regarding tech services

One-on-one tech support and problem-solving

Close-out

A closing dialogue to reinforce what was learned in the session, assess the service, promote institutional programming, and offer opportunities for follow-up

TECH SUPPORT SESSION

TYPES OF SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Tech Corps members may wear many hats during this program. It is more important that they are community-engaged problem-solvers than they are advanced IT support.

Among the responsibilities the Tech Corps members will have are:

- Engaging in community outreach to build trust, program awareness, and relationships
- Providing customer service through problem-solving technology issues
- Educating participants on technology fundamentals (Office Suite, not coding) and digital safety best practices
- Liaising between participants and anchor institution
- Referring participants to relevant resources (rather than doing the research for the participants)

Support should be offered across the following four categories:

Problem-solving

- Supporting the transition from analog to digital applications for city and social services, banking, etc.
- Basic digital guidance and education (i.e., creating online accounts, sending emails, attaching documents, etc.)
- Troubleshooting basic digital or technology issues
- Digital safety and avoiding scams and viruses

Accessing the internet or affordable devices

- Providing information about low-cost internet access options and free, low-cost, or refurbished devices::
    - Finding better priced data plans
    - Signing up for free services
    - Enrolling in/applying for an affordable internet program
    - Using existing technology services, such as hotspots or computer labs

Connecting participants to relevant social service resources

- Providing guidance around accessing online resources, completing paperwork, or providing referrals to outside services for more in-depth support on the following types of requests:
    - Tele-health
    - Paying bills
    - Lost IDs and completing online paperwork
    - Job training or online education options

Referring participants to existing digital literacy programs offered by the anchor institution

There will be limitations to what Tech Corps members can provide (i.e., tax services, banking support, etc.). Similarly, large or complex technical requests (i.e., reinstalling OS, fixing hardware) are outside the scope of services that the Tech Corps will be able to offer, as these requests become potential liability issues. As a result,we recommend drafting a disclaimer alongside a "What's In Bounds and Out of Bounds" document, as these elements will vary based on location and type of institution.

BEST PRACTICES FROM THE FIELD (cont.)

The Digital Case Worker. Building and supporting ongoing relationships with NTH participants is a common practice among similar programs. Having the Tech Corps members or Tech Corps Coordinator act as a "Digital Case Worker" allows for long-term relationship-building, goal-setting, and increased engagement with library programming.

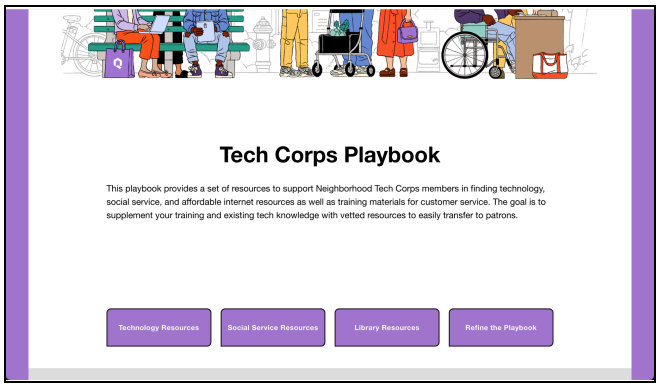
A Digital Case Worker might be responsible for:

- Following up with NTH participants
- Helping with meeting bookings
- Supporting the assignments and scheduling of Tech Corps members
- Ensuring consistent data collection and impact

Salt Lake City Libraries Digital Navigator Toolkit has a great video resource that defines this content.

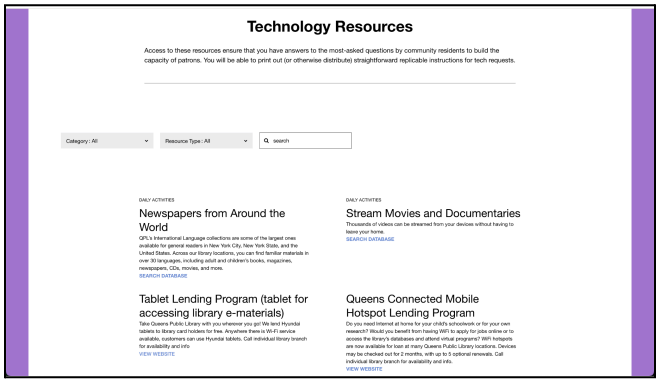
THE VALUE OF A DIGITAL PLAYBOOK

As Tech Corps members cannot be expected to remember every resource that exists related to a participant's questions, we encourage your institution to develop a Digital Playbook–a digital resource for them to easily reference commonly requested topics. In addition to vetted tech resources, a playbook can also include existing materials created by institutions on these topics, service referral information, printable forms, and other resources.



Potential Help Requests

- Using video conferencing software (i.e., Zoom, Google Meet)
- Searching for information online
- Typing on a keyboard
- Drafting & sending emails
- Looking for and downloading documents
- Scanning QR codes
- Downloading and installing apps
- Opening and sharing photos, files, and website links sent via text or email
- Adjusting phone settings
- Safely paying bills and conducting financial transactions online
- Keeping personal and financial information safe online
- Recognizing scams & disinformation on social media and other websites
- Installing and using software to protect against viruses and scams
- Developing a comfort level with Microsoft Office
- Honing job search skills: creating and editing resumes, applying to jobs online, etc.



CLOSE OUT

ENDING A SESSION

Mirroring the welcome at the start of their office hours visit, the Tech Corps members are responsible for ending the service with the same level of intentionality and an eye towards relationship-building. Each session should end with:

- An assessment by the participant of the tech support session
- A promotion of relevant institutional services and programs
- An offer to follow-up or provide additional support

Assessing the Support Session

Following the tech support session, Tech Corps members should ask a brief series of questions of the participant to assess their satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the session in addressing their issue.

Offering Follow-up

The final step of the closure process should be to determine if the participant would like to:

- Schedule a follow-up session to address any additional issues or questions
- Opt into follow-up communications about institutional programming

Digital Safety Instruction

While NTH is not set up as a classroom model, where content is predetermined and taught to interested participants, there will still be *teachable moments* in tech support sessions with participants.

Tech Corps members should use these opportunities to raise participant awareness of digital safety, a top concern among residents.

Some digital safety topics that might arise for which many public libraries already have existing trainings include:

- Password retrieval
- App or file downloads
- Unsubscribing from spam emails
- Online banking practices

Tech Corps members should be trained on and use materials from the existing digital safety resources from your local library or other agency.

TOOL: INTAKE QUESTIONNAIRE

To support the documentation and ongoing improvement of Neighborhood Tech Help, we encourage Coordinators to arrange for an Intake Questionnaire. This questionnaire could be provided to the patron to complete or filled in by the Tech Corps member through a participant interview at the start of the session.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Patron Name

Patron Email Address *(optional)*

Patron Phone Number *(optional)*

Zip code

What language are you most comfortable communicating in?

How did you hear about this program?

- ☐ Friend/family
- ☐ Organization website
- ☐ Referral from your housing provider
- ☐ Referral from another organization
- ☐ Referral from organization staff
- ☐ Advertising/marketing (i.e., flier, online ad, commercial)
- ☐ Scheduled an appointment from the 'call line' *(if applicable)*

SUPPORT NEEDS

Types of Support

What type(s) of technology support did you work on during this session? *(Check all that apply)*

- ☐ Digital skills (e.g. I need to get into my email, help using an app)
- ☐ Looking for an affordable device
- ☐ Support using a device (e.g. I need help turning on my smartphone)
- ☐ Home internet connectivity (e.g. I need help finding an Internet Service Provider)
- ☐ Social service support (e.g. I need help signing in to my NYCAccess account)
- ☐ Other (Please describe):

Specific Need or Outcome

What are your specific needs today? What do you hope to be able to do after your NTH session?

Type of Device– What type of device do you need help with? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Smartphone
- ☐ Tablet
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Desktop computer
- ☐ No personal device
- ☐ Other (Please describe):

TOOL: SESSION SUMMARY

Use the following questions to create an online and/or paper version of this summary for evaluative purposes to be completed by Tech Corps Members during or immediately after every appointment with a participant to record details of the interaction and track participant needs and program growth.

1. Name of Participant

GOALS AND NEEDS

2. Types of Support– What type(s) of technology support did you work on during this session? *(Check all that apply)*

- ☐ Need a device
- ☐ Support using a device
- ☐ Home internet/mobile connectivity
- ☐ Digital Skills
- ☐ Referral to Social Service Support
- ☐ Other (Please describe):

3. Type of Device– What type of device do you need help with? *(Select all that apply)*

- ☐ Smartphone
- ☐ Tablet
- ☐ Laptop
- ☐ Desktop computer
- ☐ No personal device
- ☐ Other (Please describe):

4. What goal(s) or specific needs/requests did you work on during this session?

5. What outcomes were achieved during the session? Include referral(s) to additional services, if appropriate.

6. Did the patron sign up for any institutional programs or services?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, already registered
- ☐ No, wasn't interested
- ☐ Other (Please describe):

SESSION INFORMATION

7. Tech Corps Member Name

8. Date of session

9. Host Site Location

10. Has the patron utilized NTH services before?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other: (please describe)

11. Approximately how long did your interaction take?

- ☐ 0-5 minutes
- ☐ 6-15 minutes
- ☐ 16-30 minutes
- ☐ More than 30 minutes

12. Session outcome:

- ☐ Follow-up scheduled
- ☐ Client to reach back out (open-ended)
- ☐ Final meeting
- ☐ Other: (please describe)

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

The Neighborhood Tech Help program model was co-designed by the New York City Department. of Housing Preservation and Development; social impact consultants TYTHEdesign; and Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library, and Queens Public Library. The project is currently being managed by the New York City Office of Technology & Innovation. Branding was developed in collaboration with L+L Studio and illustrations are by Ilya Milstein.

TYTHE design

This tool was developed by TYTHEdesign, a women-owned capacity-building firm with 15+ years of experience. TYTHE uses human-centered design, collaborative engagement, program evaluation, and insights gleaned from inclusive, mixed-method research to help clients develop resource-efficient programs that create social value.

www.tythe-design.com