Microsoft

Community skills program Frequently Asked Questions

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General information

What is the community skills program?

Microsoft has launched the community skills program as part of our broader commitment skills for employability and to addressing racial injustice in the United States. It is a $15 million dollar investment over three years to accelerate the work of Black- and African American-led nonprofits that provide digital skills and workforce development to Black and African American communities.

What are the key components of the community skills program?

Microsoft will work with eligible, US nonprofit organizations to accelerate their efforts to offer skills and workforce development programs to Black and African American opportunity youth (ages 16-24) and adult job seekers. To do this, we will provide:

- **Cash grants:** Unrestricted cash grants of up to $100,000 per year for three years to up to 50 eligible, US-based nonprofits.
- **Leadership development:** Led by an industry expert, we'll convene a community of practice to share learnings, strengthen networks, and offer professional development for the leaders of the nonprofits selected.
- **Technology enablement:** Build digital capacity and advance digital transformation of grantees by providing access to digital tech concierge and consulting services, and to donated software and services offers from Microsoft.

Why is Microsoft investing in Black- and African American-led nonprofits?

Black and African American communities are dealing with a dual pandemic – COVID-19 and continued systemic racial injustice. These communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. On top of sobering health impacts, they are bearing the brunt of the economic burden. Black and African American workers in the US are the most likely to have been laid off due to COVID, and they and many other marginalized communities have been more susceptible to shift reductions and lost income[1]. COVID-19 is exacerbating historical inequities in our communities.

To address the acute, longstanding inequities in the US and provide pathways to improved economic opportunity for the Black and African American community, we must invest in programs that help them gain access to the digital skills needed for in-demand roles in a more digital world.

What other actions is Microsoft taking to help address racial injustice?

Learn more about our overall commitment to addressing racial injustice at aka.ms/address-racial-injustice.

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[1] Public Viewpoint: COVID-19 Work and Education Survey: Strada Center for Consumer Insights. stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Public-Viewpoint-Report-Week-4.pdf

Why is the community skills program focused on digital skills?

The United States has experienced staggering job loss and unemployment numbers due to COVID-19, forcing millions of people out of work. Data shows that Black and African American workers were more likely to lose income due to the pandemic and have higher unemployment rates than their White counterparts[2].

At the same time, technology adoption has accelerated due to COVID-19, bringing years of digital transformation in mere months. This acceleration means both old and new jobs will require more digital skills, exacerbating what was already a widening skills gap. As our economy recovers, it is important that those who have historically been furthest from economic opportunity have access to the skills and credentials needed to succeed in the digital economy.

Grant criteria, eligibility, and timeline

Who is eligible to apply for the grant?

The program is open to US-based, 501(C)3 nonprofit organizations, or organizations supported by a 501(C)3 fiduciary organization, that:

- Focus their work on the Black and African American community and are Black- and African American-led
- Provide digital and professional skills development leading to increased employment opportunities in tech or tech-enabled roles for opportunity youth (ages 16-24) and/or adult job seekers

Please review the complete list of [Nonprofit Program Eligibility requirements](#) before beginning the application.

What is the size of the grant? How many organizations will be funded?

The community skills program will provide unrestricted cash grants of up to $100,000 per year over three years to up to 50 nonprofit organizations that meet the required and desired grant criteria.

When are the preliminary grant applications due? When will applicants be notified?

Preliminary grant applications are due by 5:00pm Pacific Time on Wednesday, September 30th. Applicants will be notified on or before October 30th if they are being invited to submit a full grant application.

What is the overall timeline for the community skills program?

The community skills program is a 3-year grant commitment. Preliminary grant applications are due by 5:00pm Pacific Time on Wednesday, September 30th. The key grant deadlines and program dates are below.

Phase 1: Preliminary grant application	
Preliminary grant applications DUE	Wednesday, September 30th at 5:00pm PT
Nonprofits advancing to phase 2 (to complete full grant application) notified	On or before Friday, October 30th

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[2] COVID, Racism Are Dual Crises for Black Americans: https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20200610/covid-racism-are-dual-crises-for-black-americans

Phase 2: Full grant application	
Selected nonprofits receive invitation to submit full grant application	Friday, November 6th
Technical assistance webinar for nonprofit grant submission (optional)	Two options: Wednesday, November 11th or Wednesday, November 18th
Full grant application DUE	Friday, December 11th at 3:00pm PT
Selected nonprofits are informed	On or before Friday, December 18th
Payment released to nonprofit	Thursday, January 11th
Post grant application support	
Community of Practice kick-off convening	January 2021 (exact date TBD)
Quarterly Community of Practice convening	March 2021 (exact date TBD)
Quarterly Community of Practice convening	May 2021 (exact date TBD)
Quarterly Community of Practice convening	September 2021 (exact date TBD)

Community skills program components

What type of activities are supported by the cash grant?

The community skills program will provide three years of unrestricted funds to support the operations that fall within the mission of selected nonprofits.

What is the structure of the Community of Practice?

The Community of Practice will be co-developed with grantees to ensure it meets the unique needs of the nonprofit organizations participating. The Community of Practice will convene quarterly for the first year of the grant (beginning in January 2021) and annually in Years 2 and 3. In addition to the structured convenings, there will be opportunities for informal and formal networking and individualized technology consulting.

Is participation in the Community of Practice required for grantees?

Yes, participation in the Community of Practice is required. All professional development components will be co-developed with grantees and an industry expert, and will be tailored to meet the needs of selected nonprofit leaders. Participation will enable leaders to share promising practices across the sector, strengthen networks, and increase opportunities for partnership to drive greater, collective impact.

What tech enablement services will be provided? Are devices included?

To help organizations build their digital capacity, grantees will have the opportunity to access:
- Digital concierge and consulting support services from an assigned Digital Enablement Manager to assess the current technology landscape and establish a roadmap of future tech needs
- Donated and discounted software and services offers from Microsoft

Devices are NOT included as part of the grant offer.

Community skills program application process

How do organizations apply for the community skills program?

The preliminary grant application can be accessed at aka.ms/community-skills-application. Preliminary grant applications must be submitted no later than 5:00pm Pacific Time on Wednesday, September 30th, 2020. If you have questions regarding the process or the application, please email: SkillNow@microsoft.com.

How long will it take to complete the preliminary grant application?

The preliminary grant application should take approximately forty-five minutes to an hour to complete. You will need access to key organizational programmatic data and budget history to complete it.

Can I print a copy of the online preliminary grant application to review and prepare my answers?

Yes, applicants may download a preview copy of the preliminary grant application to help them prepare their application responses. However, all applications must be submitted online. The preview document can also be accessed from *within* the preliminary grant application.

Can I pause while completing the preliminary grant application and complete it later?

No, the application must be completed in a single entry – you cannot save your progress and return to it later. However, applicants can download a preview copy of the full application to help you prepare your responses before entering them directly into the online form.

Will I receive a receipt upon submission of the preliminary grant application?

Yes, all applicants will receive an email receipt of submission. Then, all applicants will be notified of the results of their application on or before Friday, October 30th. If you do not receive an email, contact SkillNow@microsoft.com to check the status of your application.

Can I mail in the preliminary grant application?

Unfortunately, we can only accept preliminary grant applications through the online application tool.

How will the preliminary grant applications be reviewed?

The preliminary grant applications will be reviewed and scored by a committee of internal and external stakeholders. The committee is made up of individuals across Microsoft and external stakeholders with expertise in workforce development, nonprofit leadership, and policy and collective action.

If we are awarded a grant, are there specific guidelines and requirements for submitting grant reports?

Microsoft Philanthropies requires grantees to submit 6- and 12-month progress reports. The reports collect qualitative and quantitative data on the nonprofit's reach and impact. While data is collected, future support and funding is not solely determined by progress reports. Community skills program grantees will have a 3-year funding commitment; progress reports will be used to demonstrate impact and reach across the program and funding portfolio. All data collected is governed by Microsoft's privacy policy.

Who should I contact if I have questions about my preliminary grant application?

Contact SkillNow@microsoft.com with questions about the application process.