



# How US Ignite Fueled the Foundation for DigitalC's Cleveland Model and its Expansion to Detroit, Michigan

## **AUTHORS:**

Glenn Ricart, CTO, US Ignite

Lizzette Arias, Communications Manager, US Ignite

## **CONTRIBUTORS:**

Joshua Edmonds, CEO, DigitalC

Valerie Jerome, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, DigitalC

**"Throughout my career advancing digital equity, I have seen up close how US Ignite invests in ideas others often overlook. I have worked in two US Ignite cities—Detroit and Cleveland—and witnessed how the right spark of support can turn bold plans into blueprints. This story is about believing in community-rooted solutions early and giving them the space to grow."**

**- Joshua Edmonds, CEO, DigitalC**

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A US Ignite Community recently reached TWO momentous milestones. Cleveland, Ohio, became the first major US city to deploy a full next-gen fixed wireless network through a local nonprofit, DigitalC. In just 18 months, DigitalC created and deployed the Cleveland Model - a customized network explicitly designed for Cleveland. Although tailored for Cleveland's unique landscape, the engineers designed the model so that it could be a blueprint for other cities working to expand Internet connectivity. This purposeful intention led DigitalC to achieve a second equally commendable milestone - expanding into Detroit, MI.

Of course, DigitalC did not reach these successes alone. Alongside many other local and global partners, US Ignite played a vital advisory and funding role in fueling the foundation of DigitalC's transformative citywide model.



## US Ignite and Cleveland History

Cleveland was one of the first four cities to join the US Ignite Communities network in 2012. This National Science Foundation (NSF) funded cohort joined US Ignite to share resources, best practices, and lessons learned through their Internet connectivity initiatives and programs. Since then, Glenn Ricart, US Ignite founder and CTO, has advised Cleveland and DigitalC leaders working toward bringing an affordable and high-speed broadband option to Cleveland's households, specifically the unconnected and underconnected.

**“Cleveland's determination to become one of the best-connected cities stood out from the start. The NSF sponsored a workshop in the city that showcased the visionary leadership of Lev Govnick, a founding US Ignite Board member. That event demonstrated the potential of technologies, like 3D television, delivered over next-gen ultra-fast Internet. It was a powerful glimpse of how Cleveland could lead the way in innovation.”**

- Glenn Ricart, CTO, US Ignite



In 2021, NSF provided a unique opportunity for this exact type of work through a \$2.7 million Project OVERCOME grant. The funds aimed to increase Internet connectivity among unconnected households using novel broadband technology solutions. As the Project OVERCOME managers, US Ignite proposed DigitalC as one of seven grant recipients. DigitalC used these funds to connect an apartment community in Lexington Village using a private LTE over CBRS solution. Recognizing that connectivity was not enough, DigitalC also offered local technical support and device-purchase assistance to participating residents.

The DigitalC Project OVERCOME pilot at Lexington Village demonstrated the viability of community-based solutions and laid the groundwork for larger-scale philanthropic investment. In fact, DigitalC was selected for a \$20 million grant from the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Foundation and the David and Inez Myers Foundation. This funding helped to expand capacity to provide access and accelerate the adoption of its broadband connectivity infrastructure throughout Cleveland.

## Building the Cleveland Model

The early efforts from demonstrations like Project OVERCOME showed what could be. They began to lay a solid foundation for a broader expansion. When the City of Cleveland issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for digital equity investment, DigitalC was more than ready. Building on the momentum, it leveraged philanthropic support, community trust, and technical expertise to secure the funding necessary to connect more residents to its new high-speed home Internet services, [Canopy](#), delivered via the next-generation citywide network that exists today.



As a result, every Cleveland resident can now obtain high-speed home Internet service for \$18/month, with 100 Mbps down and 100 Mbps up. Since the January 2024 launch, over 5,400 households have been connected, and there is a steady increase in quarter-over-quarter subscriber growth rate. Moreover, DigitalC's digital skills training team, [Click](#), has trained over 11,000 residents in the same timeframe.

All of this success rests on a foundation of tireless smart fixed wireless technology pilots, community partner support, and the foresight of embedding the network control center alongside spaces for training, social connection, and community impact.

## Replicating Success in Detroit, MI

DigitalC will now export the Cleveland Model to Detroit, MI (the first expansion into the Detroit market). The new three-year project, [Canopy Powered by Connect313](#), will bring free high-speed home Internet access (up to 500 Mbps down/100 Mbps up) to 450 families in Detroit Housing Commission communities. The initiative, founded by the Rocket Community Fund and Microsoft, will significantly reduce household expenses and open pathways for residents to access digital opportunities in education, work, and healthcare. Not to mention, deliver reliable home connectivity.



Why Detroit? Not only was Detroit a Project OVERCOME grant recipient and partner with US Ignite, but Joshua Edmonds, DigitalC's CEO, served as the nation's first Director of Digital Inclusion during his time with the City of Detroit. In that role, he helped share one of the country's first and most ambitious digital equity strategies.

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## Connect with US Ignite

US Ignite's work with DigitalC provides a prime case study in how our expertise can help cities address complex issues like providing high-speed and affordable Internet access. Any community seeking a tech-enabled solution to improve residents' lives can leverage US Ignite's resources. Recently, US Ignite has worked on projects spanning [broadband strategy plans](#) to [smart lighting and mesh network pilots](#). No matter the technology, budget, or size, US Ignite is here to help turn aspirations into sustainable and scalable success. Contact us to get started at [communities@us-ignite.org](mailto:communities@us-ignite.org).

