



Program Guide

Transformative Technology for Nonprofits

The Office of Innovation and Technology (OIT) is launching a new 9-week course for Philadelphia's nonprofit community. Together, we'll tackle digital challenges, share solutions, and build stronger connections. As the City's tech steward, OIT is bringing nonprofits together to strengthen their digital capacity and resilience. Powered by Thomas Jefferson University's award-winning Nexus Learning model, the SPARK Innovation Academy: Transformative Technology for Nonprofits blends hands-on learning with real-world peer collaboration.

**Unlock the Transformative Power of Innovation & Technology
by Mastering Key Principles & Practical Tech Tools Needed to Drive
Positive Change in the Communities you Serve!**

This program will enroll 20 students and teach them how to successfully deploy innovation tools and human-centered design practices, grow their professional network, and master technologies that will improve their day-to-day work. This includes mastering collaboration tools, survey and data visualization techniques, concept mapping, social media and design strategies, and A.I tools. By working with OIT, your organization will be a core part of shaping a stronger digital future for Philadelphia.

The deadline for applying to the SPARK Innovation Academy Transformative Technology for Nonprofits is at 5:00pm on Friday, November 14th, 2025.

For more information, please email digital.equity@phila.gov.

Course Content

The framework for The SPARK Innovation Academy: Transformative Technology for Nonprofits is inspired by the changing technology landscape and rooted in Jefferson University's signature [Nexus Learning™](#) pedagogy, using their award-winning [Design, Engineering & Commerce \(DEC\) Core Curriculum](#).

Each week presents a key theme, activities, and a tech lab to learn new methods and technologies that will support your work. The course framework includes the following:

Week 1: Orientation

A Meet-and-Greet for participants and SPARK Innovation Academy organizers to get to know one another and provide some initial level setting around the program scope, goals, and final deliverables. In addition, this introductory session will review some common document sharing tools to make sure that Academy participants are able to work collaboratively over the following few weeks.

Tech Lab:

- ✓ Learn the tips and tricks of Microsoft and Google collaborative tools to work smarter.

Week 2: Introduction to Technology & Design Thinking

Nonprofits often lack resources and struggle to manage to keep up with current technologies. Asking the right questions about our problems to frame the ways that we integrate and use technology in our work. “Why do we need to use this?” “What is the underlying problem we are trying to solve?” “Is there a technology that can be used to help with this problem?”

Tech Lab:

- ✓ Discover the power of Miro and how to use AI together with Design Thinking tools to better understand concepts and advance ideas.
- ✓ Reframe problem statements and create value propositions.

Week 3: Data Collection, Survey Tools, and Asking the Right Questions

Nonprofits must often gather relevant community data, collect customer feedback to inform program development, and then share their outcomes and impact of their programs with funders. Gathering the right data requires the right frameworks and questions and the selection of the appropriate tools and methods. What role does technology play in this process?

Tech Lab:

- ✓ Learn what makes a good survey and which survey tools are best for your needs? We'll practice with tools such as, Qualtrics, Google and Microsoft Forms, SurveyMonkey, or Lime.
- ✓ How can non-profits leverage AI for running focus groups, generating questions, and reviewing results?

Week 4: Data Analysis, Mapping, and Visualization

Collecting data is only useful if we can then make meaning from it and share the results in ways that demonstrate the power of our work. For nonprofits, translating and analyzing the data can result in increased funding and support. Here, we learn to analyze and present data using multiple approaches, with an emphasis on “data literacy” and how technology can support meaningful communication of data.

Tech Lab:

- ✓ Better understand stakeholders to communicate information more effectively
- ✓ Unlock the power of Excel to create graphs, charts, and more from your data to visualize the power of your programs
- ✓ Use AI tools to take your data and generate beautiful visualizations.

Week 5: Value Propositions and Business Models

Nonprofits often don't have the time to consider if their work is backed by data or how the data can help determine where to focus and where to move on. This week focuses on using tools that can help decision-making based on modeling.

Investigating technology tools to help visualize the value your organization brings to the community you're serving will be a large component of this chapter.

Tech Lab:

- ✓ Learn about publicly available data, maps, and other digital resources to research and gather data and create maps
- ✓ Use Miro to create Value Propositions and to understand the “system” around the value you provide.

Week 6: Storytelling, Using Creative Media Tools and Communicating Success

Telling stories of community impact is one of the most important ways nonprofits can get funding and show their success to donors and key community leaders. It is critical to learn

how to frame these stories to different audiences and to translate them into digital format for broader reach.

Tech Lab:

- ✓ Use AI to help create personas to help drive messages
- ✓ Analyze various modes of communication and their best uses
- ✓ Use Firefly and other image generation software to prototype communication strategies

Week 7: Using Social Media for Maximum Impact in Public Communication

As frontline providers, nonprofits must be in constant communication with the community, funders, and public officials. How do we continue to update our social media strategies to effectively reach all our audiences?

Tech Lab:

- ✓ Intro to social media best practices and principles
- ✓ Use of low-cost, open source visual and audio creation tools to create powerful images, compositions, and videos for your social media channels, such as Adobe Express, Canva

Week 8: AI & “The Next New Thing”

Whether we like it or not, AI is here to stay. Organizations need to understand the benefits and pitfalls of AI and learn to use it ethically and appropriately to stay current and maintain continued improvement. Exploring the next frontier in technology adoption, more specifically automation through A.I. and LLMs, and reflecting on technology hype versus deliberate strategies. We’ll look at what do we want to automate with A.I. tools versus what we can automate and what we should automate.

Tech Lab:

- ✓ A full AI rundown will provide LLM comparisons (OpenAI, Gemini, Claude, Copilot).
- ✓ “Prompts 101”: understanding how to use LLMs thoughtfully and effectively
- ✓ Use AI tools for specific use cases in your non-profit everyday work.

Week 9: Synthesis and Learning Networks

Participants will present their culminating project based on their Learning Journey and Problem Statement they have identified and create a presentation using the technology

tools they have developed in class (video, ppt, or another preferred digital format), that can be shared with the broader learning network.

Course Logistics & Eligibility Information

Only nonprofits with locations in Philadelphia and who serve Philadelphia residents are eligible to participate in the SPARK Innovation Academy: Transformative Technology for Nonprofits. Candidates should be comfortable with common office technology and emailing, but do not need any advanced skills to participate in this course. The cost of the course is \$2,500.00 per participant. This covers all course instructors, space, food, and more. All selected applicants will receive a **full scholarship** from the City of Philadelphia to attend the program.

The course will run from:

- ✓ **Start Date: January 13th, 2026**
- ✓ *Week Break: March 9th - 15th, 2026*
- ✓ **End date: March 17th, 2026**

The course will be delivered from 12:00pm – 4:30pm each Tuesday for 9 weeks:

- ✓ Orientation will take place at the City's Innovation Lab located in the Municipal Services Building at **1401 John F Kennedy Blvd, Philadelphia, 19102.**
- ✓ All following courses from week 2 through week 9 will be held at Jefferson University's East Falls campus located at **4201 Henry Ave., Philadelphia, 19144.**

Participants are expected to arrive at 12:00pm so that a staff member can let them into the building as the doors lock automatically. Participants are also responsible for organizing their own transportation to and from the sites (public transportation is recommended). Lunch will be served onsite from 12:00pm-12:45pm. A coffee break will be provided halfway through each class.

At the end of the course, participants will present a final project of their learnings to the cohort and will receive a certificate of completion. After the program is completed, students will have the opportunity to participate in ongoing professional development opportunities with other Academy alumni.

Students are expected to be able to participate in all classes. Please see attendance requirements in the following section.

Application Information

Application Process & Timeline

Applicants must submit an [online application form](#) to be considered for the program. Two virtual information sessions will be held before the application window closes to address any questions and/or concerns. Selected applicants will be invited for a brief conversation with members of the Innovation team. Once participants are finalized, OIT will request commitment letters from the chosen non-profit organizations to confirm attendance throughout the course and continued support for the innovation success of their participating employees. Nonprofits may have two staff apply and attend the course together. This helps ensure that what is learned can be taken back and translated into real practice.

Please complete your online application by 5:00pm on Friday, November 14th, 2025.

Wednesday, October 1 st , 2025	Virtual Information Session #1
Tuesday, October 14 th , 2025	Application window opens
Wednesday, October 22 nd , 2025	Virtual Information Session #2
Friday, November 14th, 2025 at 5:00PM	Application window closes
Monday, December 1 st – Tuesday, December 16 th , 2025	Selected candidate will be asked to attend a 20-30min virtual interview. Please note: Interviews are <u>mandatory</u> for consideration in this program.
Wednesday, December 17 th , 2025	Final cohort members notified of selection. All applicants are notified of application status.
Tuesday, January 13 th , 2026	Week 1 Orientation at Municipal Services Building
Tuesday, January 20 th , 2026	Week 2 Courses begin at East Falls Jefferson University Campus
March 9 th – 15 th , 2026	Week Break
Tuesday, March 17 th , 2026	Week 9 Final Course Ends

**Some interview and/or status notification dates are subject to change – thank you for your flexibility.*

Attendance Requirements

Selected applicants are expected to commit to attending all sessions (outside of extenuating circumstances), as teachings build on previous weeks. Missing any of the course programming will severely impact attendees' education. The dates for the 2026 Academy are as follows:

- ✓ Tuesday, January 13th – Week 1 Mandatory Orientation
- ✓ Tuesday, January 20th – Week 2 First Class
- ✓ Tuesday, January 27th
- ✓ Tuesday, February 3rd
- ✓ Tuesday, February 10th
- ✓ Tuesday, February 17th
- ✓ Tuesday, February 24th
- ✓ Tuesday, March 3rd
- ✓ Tuesday, March 17th – Week 9 Final Class

If you know that you will need to miss more than one class, we respectfully ask that you not apply for this year's cohort.

Qualities & Attributes

This program is suited to executive directors, program managers, and project managers. We also consider applications from frontline staff interested in learning technical skills. Importantly, this program is for nonprofits who often can't afford to hire professional design, marketing, or evaluation staff.

There are a few key attributes that we look for in applicants for this program:

- ✓ **A continued commitment to innovation** – We encourage “graduates” to stay involved and invested in our innovation portfolio beyond the Academy. Program participants should remain actively engaged in the Innovation Network so they can continue to hone their skills and contribute to Philadelphia's culture of innovation.
- ✓ **A strong communicator** – One of the goals of the Academy is to train employees to be ambassadors for innovation in their organizations, so it is important that selected applicants be comfortable and confident sharing their learnings with colleagues, both during and after the course.
- ✓ **An eagerness to collaborate** - The true value of the program comes from the collective problem-solving and conversations between employees that happen both in the classroom and beyond, so selected candidates should be comfortable working with people from across different non-profits and teams.

- ✓ **A sense of ownership over a project and / or program** – While employees of all levels are encouraged to apply to the Academy, people who have some level of ownership over a specific program, project, or process tend to get the most out of the course.