



CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Base Camp Coding Academy

Pilot Project Case Study

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LOCATION

Water Valley, MS

PROJECT COSTS

\$583,135

Total Funding

\$393,600

TVA Connected Communities

\$189,535

Pilot Team Match

FOCUS AREAS



Economic Empowerment

Project Summary

Base Camp Coding Academy in rural Mississippi expanded its successful software development career training program to serve a greater and more diverse population of adults.

TOPICS

- ✓ Software Development Training
- ✓ Career Readiness and Placement

KEY PARTNERS

- Software Training Institute
- Project Advisor





“ As the director and one of the instructors, I am able to witness these students start their new career path with an impressive set of technical skills, elevated leadership and professionalism and a newfound humble confidence in themselves.

BRIANA TALLEY | director, Graduate Institute at Base Camp Coding Academy

Challenge and Solution



Challenge

Well-paying careers can be hard to come by in small, rural towns across the US. Without jobs like these, many young people leave for bigger cities with more opportunities. This leaves rural towns with fewer residents and less money from taxes to address community challenges. Without an influx of jobs that can be done in rural parts of the US, many rural towns will continue to face a reduced population.



Solution

Base Camp Coding Academy in rural Mississippi expanded its successful software development career training program to serve a greater and more diverse population of adults.

Focus Areas Supported



Economic Empowerment

Software development is needed in various business sectors and jobs can be done virtually anywhere with a stable internet connection. Onsite training programs provide graduates with in-demand skillsets and the option to continue to live in their communities while working higher-paying remote jobs that keep their talent in the region.

Goals, Approach and Results

Project Goals

Since 2016, Base Camp Coding Academy has created a pipeline for under-advantaged youth in rural Mississippi to access careers in software development. Through the Connected Communities funding opportunity, the Base Camp Coding Academy team sought to expand the program to serve a more diverse student population, including those with prior work experience, veterans and adults looking for a career change.

The result is an onsite operational training program with outcomes that inspire prospective students, employers and other communities looking to expand their understanding of technology-based career pathways.



PILOT PROJECT GOAL

Expand the program to serve a more diverse student population.

Goals, Approach and Results

Project Approach

The original Base Camp Coding Academy created a pipeline for under-advantaged youth in rural Mississippi to access careers in software development. Base Camp Coding Academy provides a year-long program where recent high school graduates train to become software engineers. Free for students, this program provides the fundamentals of coding, application development and professional skills — all of which are necessary for success in future coding careers. The original program was funded through an early push for philanthropic support and later transitioned primarily to corporate partners who saw the value in training their future workforce and hiring students as they graduate from the program.

The initial success of this program led to community members inquiring about opportunities for adult education. To expand the program offering at Base Camp Coding

Academy, the team needed to source enough funding to essentially design an entirely new program, requiring the same amount of upfront cost as the original program; this new initiative required new staff, an updated curriculum design, new training strategy development and refined classroom teaching skills. Additionally, Base Camp Coding Academy had a single-classroom campus at the time and lacked the space to accommodate further programming to satisfy community needs.

For the following year, the team was campaigning and fundraising, seeking funding partners in the same manner that launched the original Base Camp Coding Academy. To supplement corporate and philanthropic funding, the team explored funding opportunities and chose to pursue the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Connected Communities grant.

“ The Connected Communities application is one of the most accessible applications I’ve seen. Just tell us what you want to do. Their energy was really seeking to figure out what works so other communities can repeat it without making the same mistakes, just leveraging the lessons learned.

KAGAN COUGHLIN | Base Camp Coding Academy

Goals, Approach and Results

Project Approach (CONTINUED)

After securing the Connected Communities grant, the Base Camp Coding Academy team began designing the programming, taking the needs and concerns of their target age demographic into consideration; the priorities of most 20-50-year-olds are vastly different than those of 18-19-year-olds. The new program—named the [Base Camp Coding Academy Graduate Institute](#)—would offer a self-motivated learning opportunity for adult students with checkpoints to assess retention and application over the one-year duration. By updating the strategies and curriculum for their program, the Base Camp Coding Academy team ensured that what is taught in the classroom is still relevant for every graduate to achieve technical proficiency and employment success. The first cohort of the Base Camp Coding

Academy Graduate Institute started their journey in September 2022, with successful graduates achieving their certification in August 2023. Throughout this first year of programming, the Graduate Institute team found that some of their adult learners struggled with meeting the expectations of the program, so they reinstated many of the coaching and accountability measures they used with the original Base Camp Coding Academy classes.

The refined approach proved successful, and a second cohort began in September 2023, graduating the following August. A third cohort began in May 2024, with the program now sustained through internal and third-party funding to ensure the continuation of both the original Base Camp Coding Academy and the Graduate Institute.

“ We found that all people are people, and they all need the same support. If you lay [all the resources] out there, the ones that are driven will take what they need out of the toolbox. You shouldn't shortchange anyone by assuming they have the skills already.

KAGAN COUGHLIN | Base Camp Coding Academy

Goals, Approach and Results

Project Results

The key metric for success is the percentage of employed graduates.

Key Partners

Base Camp Coding Academy has an active board comprised of volunteer members who are local leaders in the business and technology sectors and have decades of experience. The board leads curriculum development, admissions, quarterly evaluations and business partner relations. Additionally, Base Camp Coding Academy has three staff members who are involved in the day-to-day operations of the program.

- **Base Camp Coding Academy**
 - **Brittany Cohen**, technical director
 - **Sean Ennis**, director
 - **Corey Mize**, director of outreach, admissions and placement
- **Base Camp Coding Academy Graduate Institute (Phase 2)**
 - **Kagan Coughlin**, cofounder
 - **Glen Evans**, cofounder
 - **Trey Shelton**, technical director
 - **Briana Talley**, director
- **Tennessee Valley Authority**
 - **Lisa Akins**, senior program manager
 - **Georgia Caruthers**, senior project lead

GRADUATE PERCENTAGE

56%

Cohort 1*

56%

Cohort 2*

*There are several pending job offers for both cohorts as of August 2024, which may increase these percentages.

Lessons Learned

1

Set Expectations and Hold Accountability

The Base Camp Coding Academy Graduate Institute offers free tuition to students, meaning some participants may not be as motivated to meet educational standards as if they were to pay for the opportunity themselves. Initially, the Base Camp Coding Academy team assumed that adult learners would hold themselves accountable to standards and coursework, but they quickly found some students were not meeting expectations.

“ We have a good percentage of students who are our target: they want to make a career change and they want an opportunity without the financial burden. We also had about the same amount that saw this as just a free opportunity that may or may not impact their life. It’s discouraging, but it’s also hopeful for the ones that are making this change. It’s why the Graduate Institute was formed.

BRIANA TALLEY | director of the Base Camp Graduate Institute

Utilizing learning benchmarks and accountability measures ensured unmotivated students were removed from the program, allowing participants who were committed to the experience to receive additional coaching, feedback and attention.

2

Consider Participants’ Lifestyles

Adult students often have full-time jobs, but the team has adapted course timing to student schedules and anticipate challenges. In addition, they offer free onsite childcare during classes for the students who have children. They also offer critical medical/life event deferment to accommodate students with caretaker responsibilities.

3

Partner With Industry Organizations

By engaging industry organizations that benefit from a skilled workforce, the Base Camp Coding Academy team was able to secure funding for the initial program and develop dedicated pipelines for graduate job placement opportunities. These partnerships can also provide meaningful feedback to help program administrators refine program objectives and methods to better meet the needs of employers.

Lessons Learned

4

Develop Coaching Relationships

Mentorship can be crucial to helping students complete courses, and the team has partnered with TVA's information technology and other professionals to provide that mentorship. It is good practice to reach agreements with mentors as early as possible in the process and provide training to ensure alignment with program objectives.

5

Incorporate Career Development

The team has also found that incorporating career development into the curriculum was key. Structuring coursework in a way that encourages strategic planning and collaboration mimics real-life, enabling participants to better prepare for their future careers. A parallel curriculum focusing on project management helps Graduate Institute students apply their knowledge to deliver products that meet proposed business objectives efficiently and effectively. The program also integrates professional and technical mock interviews into training and education-focused interventions to maximize job placement.

6

Remain Open to Feedback

Every learner's needs will be different, and considering their feedback is critical to the long-term success of any program. By actively listening to the students' experiences and looking at the associated data, the Graduate Institute team has continued to refine their approach with each new cohort. As more needs and considerations are uncovered, the resources, teaching and recruiting methods must adapt to ensure the highest quality experience for participants, staff and the community.

BASE CAMP GRADUATE INSTITUTE PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK ACTIVITIES:

- Quarterly peer and instructor evaluations, which are anonymously provided to the individual to help them grow and evaluate their own performance
- 1:1 meetings with the director every five to ten weeks to discuss progress and address any concerns the student may have
- Anonymous Net Promoter Score (NPS) which pulses how likely a student is to recommend the program based on their experience



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Looking Ahead

After the expiration of the Connected Communities grant funding, the Base Camp Coding Academy team has taken over the financial responsibility of the program and is currently running a third cohort of the Graduate Institute program, which began in May 2024. Approval for a cohort 4 was also recently received, which will begin in May 2025.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Base Camp Coding Academy

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