

UNE Academy Solutions Labs

Digital Solutions for the Greater Good

Overview - 2017-01-23

Maine is home to a growing knowledge economy in which internationally-recognized businesses, nonprofits and agencies use digital technologies to support clients at home and around the world.

In order to continue to grow this knowledge economy, UNE has developed the UNE Academy, a world-class learning initiative that is preparing contemporary learners — of all ages and backgrounds, from Maine and beyond — to master the competencies required for career advancement in knowledge-based occupations. The Academy's initial focus is on professions that identify challenges and prototype, evaluate, and develop digital products.

Introducing the Solutions Labs

In parallel with Academy programs we envision the UNE Academy Solutions Labs, a collection of focused collaborative teams bringing together issue experts, business, government, and education leaders, along with professionals and learners, to collaboratively identify regional challenges and develop solutions that benefit Maine people and communities, and increase economic well-being.

For example, in parallel with the Academy's Digital Sciences programs, a Digital Solutions Lab would lead research, development, and implementation partners to create new digital solutions to support the development and advancement of digital-savvy talent here in Maine and advance the region's economy and quality of life.

Initiatives would be sought and researched in partnership with external agencies, companies, and nonprofits and collaboration with with UNE faculty, learners, and staff.

Solutions Labs would build on the collective impact model initiated at Stanford by bringing together stakeholders invested in successful solutions to sector problems with the Lab collaborative to identify control groups and measures of success aligned to larger evidence-backed research and datasets.

Each Solutions Lab initiative would be championed by a passionate community leader and would be designed to have a measurable impact on constituents, building on the collective insights of participants from multiple sectors and multiple professions. Potential solutions for the Digital Solutions Lab could include: apps that help people find careers that match their interests; websites that communicate complex but meaningful knowledge; and tools that help researchers gather and present critical data about talent development in education and the workplace.

Criteria for selection would include:

- Clear definition of challenges to be investigated and constituencies to be served
- Identified impact on the identified constituencies and related groups
- Quantified metrics for continuous improvement
- Optimal utilization of Lab resources
- Alignment with UNE mission and values

Solutions Labs Teams and Process

Lab teams would include professionals, learners, and experts led by UNE staff. Project teams would include:

- A professional project manager (with funding)
- Clients and constituents from across sectors
- Volunteer or paid core designers and developers
- Academy learners with multiple levels of expertise
- Interested community and regional observers and contributors
- Control groups of constituents who test and evaluate digital solutions

Once problems are clearly identified and analyzed, solutions would be thoughtfully planned and prototyped and then thoroughly evaluated during iterative cycles for continuous improvement and measured against goals developed with clients. All work and resulting data would be open sourced and shared publicly.

The Solutions Labs would investigate similar programs around the country and around the world to learn about the factors that lead toward success.

The Solutions Lab would connect real-world challenges with the network of knowledge professionals to make a difference in Maine and beyond.