

# Digital Equity Act

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**WORLD EDUCATION**

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# Need for Digital Inclusion

# What is Digital Equity and Inclusion?

## **digital equity**

is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. *(H.R.3684)*

## **digital inclusion**

refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to, and use of, affordable information and communication technologies. *(H.R.3684)*

## **digital skills**

are defined as a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information. *(UNESCO)*

## **digital resilience**

is having the awareness, skills, agility, and confidence to be empowered users of new technologies and adapt to changing digital skill demands. *(Digital US)*

## **digital literacy**

is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. *(ALA)*

# Elements of Digital Inclusion



**Affordable, robust  
internet service**



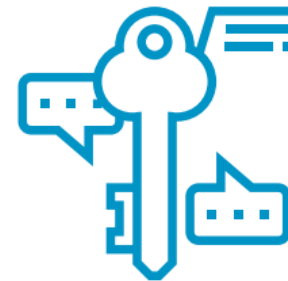
**Internet-enabled devices  
that meet user needs**



**Technical  
support**



**Applications + online content  
that meet user needs**



**Digital literacy  
training**

80% of middle-skill jobs require digital skills.<sup>16</sup>

Yet...



**Access**

**18** million

**households do not have internet access**

including 14 million low-income households in urban areas and 4 million in rural areas.<sup>17</sup>

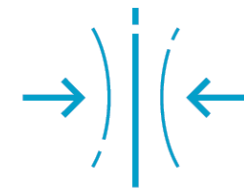


**Skills**

**32** million

**adults can't use a computer**

and 1/3 of U.S. workers and 1/2 of Black and Latino workers have limited or no digital skills.<sup>18</sup>



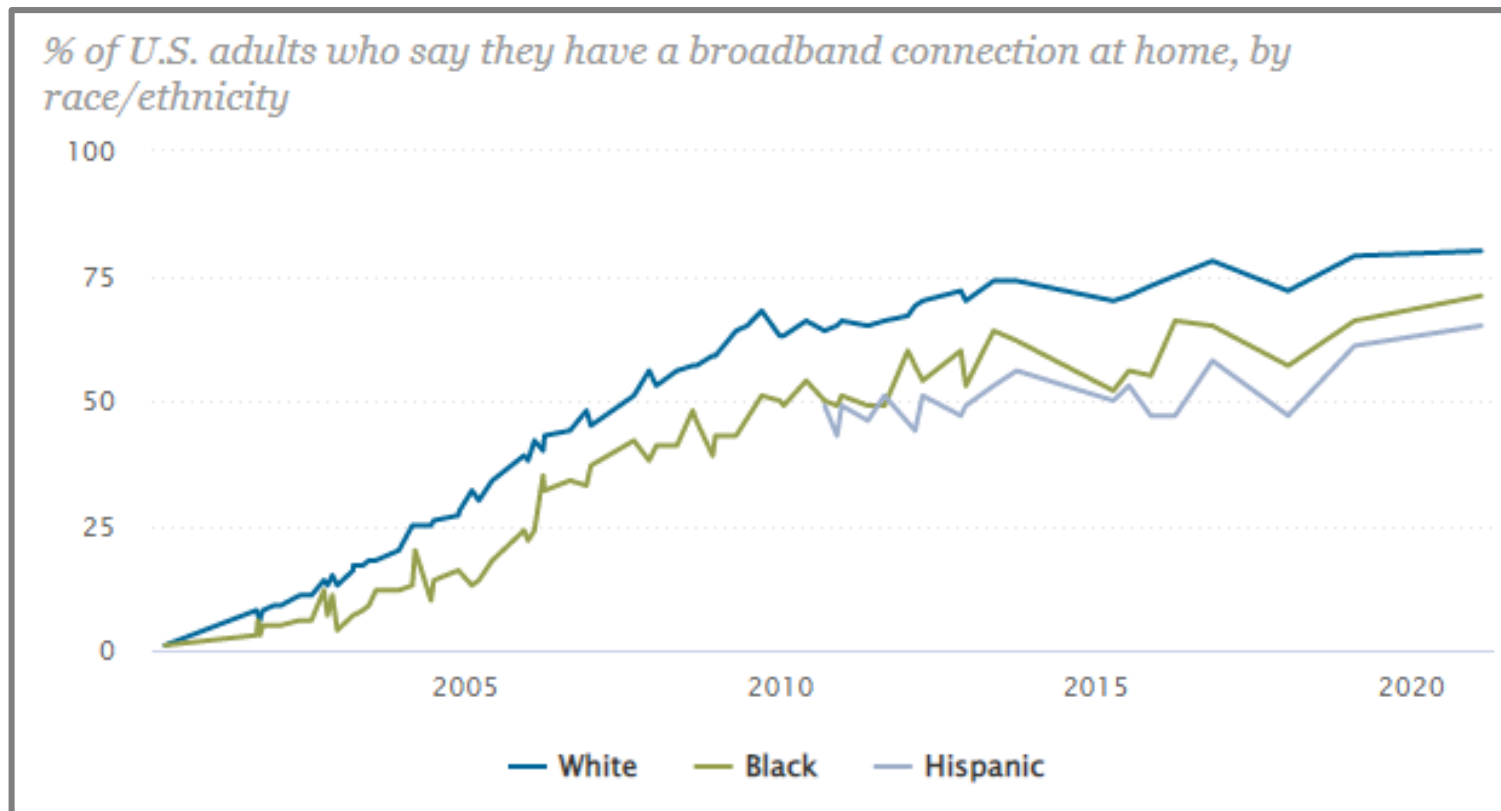
**Resilience**

**1/2**

**of Americans aren't comfortable using technology to learn**

and **OECD** found that 72% of US lack sufficient digital problem-solving skills, including 58% of millennials.<sup>19</sup>

# The Disproportionate Impact of Digital Exclusion

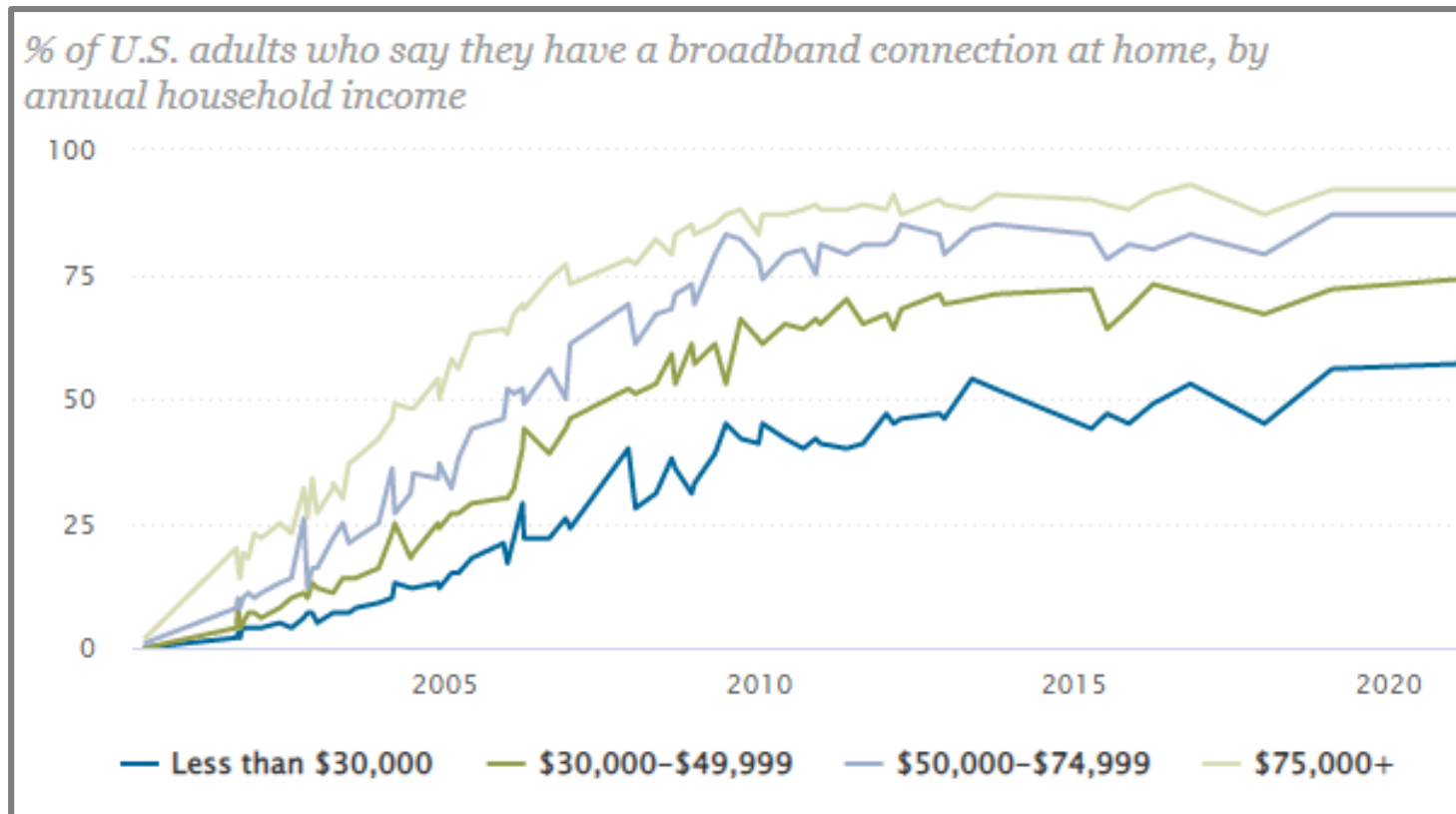


80% of white adults

71% of Black adults

65% of Hispanic adults

# The Disproportionate Impact of Digital Exclusion



**57%:** Less than \$30,000

**74%:** \$30,000-\$49,999

**87%:** \$50,000-\$74,999

**92%:** \$75,000+

# The Disproportionate Impact of Digital Exclusion

## Mobile-only Internet use

is associated with

- Being low-income
- Being a person of color
- Having less education

## Owning a large-screen device

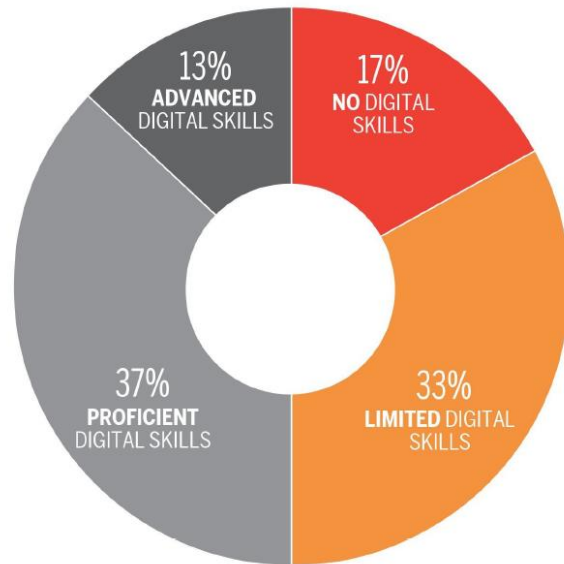
is associated with

- Larger social networks
- Better health outcomes
- Employment and educational benefits



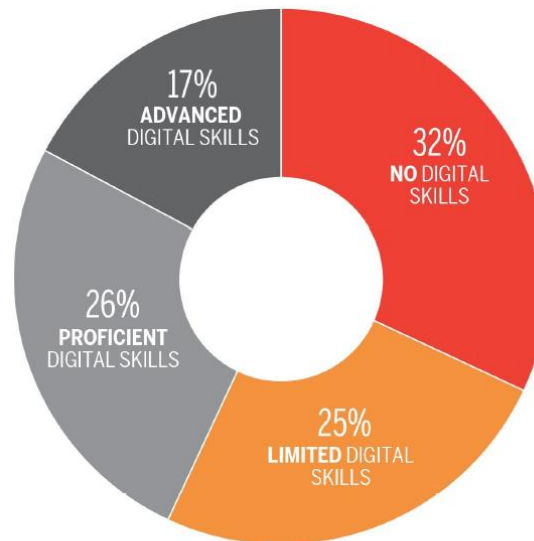
# The Disproportionate Impact of Digital Exclusion

## HALF OF BLACK WORKERS NEED DIGITAL SKILLS



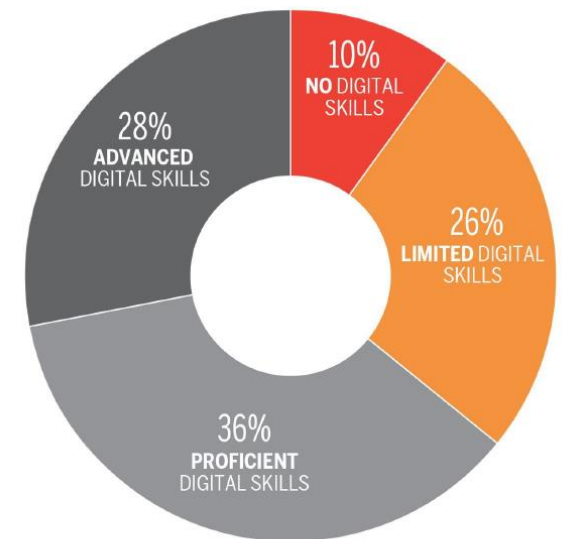
Currently employed US workers ages 16-64. Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), 2012-14.

## MORE THAN HALF OF LATINO WORKERS NEED DIGITAL SKILLS



Currently employed US workers ages 16-64. Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), 2012-14.

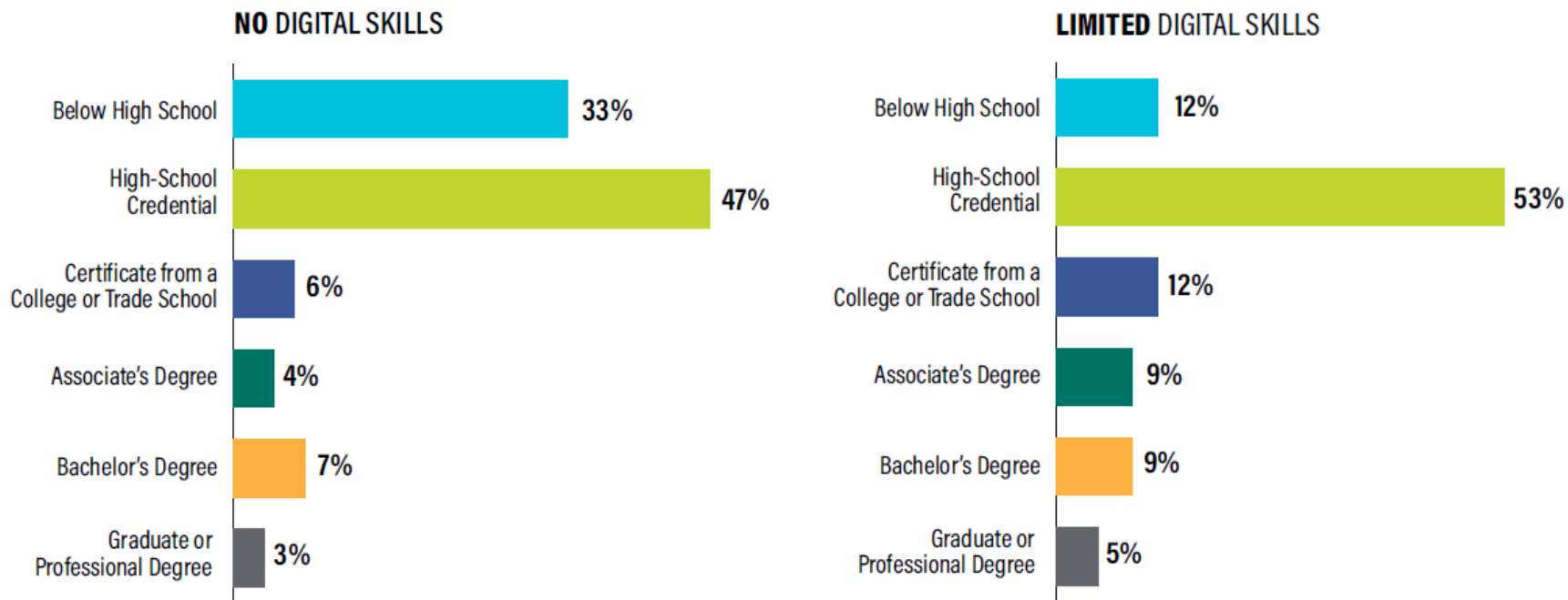
## ONE-THIRD OF ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER WORKERS NEED DIGITAL SKILLS



Currently employed US workers ages 16-64. Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), 2012-14.

# The Disproportionate Impact of Digital Exclusion

## MOST WORKERS WITH DIGITAL SKILL GAPS HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION OR LESS



Currently employed US workers ages 16-64. Source: *OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) 2012-14*.

National Skills Coalition, <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/the-new-landscape-of-digital-literacy/>

# The Disproportionate Impact of Digital Exclusion – on Immigrants

21% of immigrants who speak a language other than English in the home have **no computer experience** vs 5% percent for English speakers

12% of foreign-born U.S. residents who speak a language other than English have **high levels of digital problem-solving** vs 36% percent of native-born, native-language residents

Low-income immigrants are more likely to be **smartphone-dependent**, resulting in **fragmented knowledge** (proficient in some essential skills but not others)

## When some of US are **not** able to:



- Apply for jobs online
- Use basic operations software at work
- Use technology for continuous learning
- Work online



- Access health, financial, government or other services online
- Sell or buy new or upcycled things online
- Monitor water or electricity use online




- Participate in children's schools' communications systems
- Engage with civic issues online
- Access resources to be an informed citizen

## It impacts **ALL** of US:

Local businesses, employers, schools, communities, healthcare, government and service providers, our environment and more



# Digital Equity Act 101



# What is the Digital Equity Act?

- Part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
- \$2.75 billion over five years
- Administered through the Department of Commerce's [National Telecommunications and Information Administration \(NTIA\)](#)
- Read the full text [here](#)



# Why DEA?

“[A] **broadband connection** and **digital literacy** are increasingly critical to how individuals—  
(A) participate in the society, economy, and civic institutions of the [US]; and  
(B) access health care and essential services, obtain education, and build careers”

## “[D]igital exclusion

(A) carries a high societal and economic cost;

(B) materially harms the opportunity of an individual with respect to the economic success, educational achievement, positive health outcomes, social inclusion, and civic engagement of that individual; and

(C) exacerbates existing wealth and income gaps, especially those experienced by covered populations”



## Why DEA?

“[A]chieving **digital equity** for all people of the [US] requires additional and sustained investment and research efforts”

“The Federal Government [and other governments] have made **social, legal, and economic obligations** that necessarily extend to how the citizens and residents...**access and use the internet**”

“[A]chieving **digital equity** is a matter of **social and economic justice** and is worth pursuing”



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# Important Definitions

- **Digital Literacy:** “the skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information”
- **Digital Equity:** “the condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States”
- **Digital Inclusion:**
  - Affordable access to and the use of reliable broadband, internet-enabled devices, and applications and online content
  - Digital literacy training; quality technical support; basic knowledge to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity



# DEA Funding for States

## Interested states must:

- Appoint an **administering entity** to oversee planning and implementation
- Apply for planning funds and develop a **State Digital Equity Plan**
- Submit their Digital Equity Plan for formula funding via the **State Digital Equity Capacity Grant** (\$1.44B over five years)

## State Digital Equity Planning Grant

- \$60M available for states to develop their DEP
- Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) expected in May 2022



# State Digital Equity Plan

## Must include:

- (A) “the identification of the **barriers** to digital equity faced by covered populations in the State”
- (B) “**measurable objectives** for documenting and promoting...”
  - (A) the availability of and affordability of access to broadband
  - (B) “the online accessibility and inclusivity of public...services”
  - (C) “digital literacy”
  - (D) the use of measures to ensure individual online privacy and cybersecurity
  - (E) “the availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support for those devices”



# State Digital Equity Plan

## Must include:

- (C) “An **assessment** of how [the above objectives] will impact and interact with the State’s—
  - (A) economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes;
  - (B) educational outcomes;
  - (C) health outcomes;
  - (D) civic and social engagement; and
  - (E) delivery of other essential services”

# State Digital Equity Plan

## Must include:

(D) a description of how the State will **collaborate with key stakeholders** in order to achieve the above objectives, including

- (A) community anchor institutions;
- (B) county and municipal governments;
- (C) local educational agencies;
- (D) Tribal entities or organizations;
- (E) nonprofit organizations;
- (F) organizations that represent individuals with disabilities, aging individuals, individuals with language barriers, veterans, and incarcerated individuals;
- (G) civil rights organizations;
- (H) workforce development program providers;
- (I) **State agencies administering adult education activities;**
- (J) public housing authorities;
- (K) partnerships between any of the above

(E) a **list of organizations** with which the State's administering entity collaborated in developing and implementing the DEP



# Administering Entity

## Responsible for:

- Developing, implementing, and overseeing the State DEP
- Making subgrants to key stakeholders who will support the State DEP and digital inclusion activities, advocate for digital equity policy and digital inclusion, and serve as a repository of best practice materials
- **Eligible entities:** the State, non-school not-for-profits, non-school **community anchor institutions**, local educational agencies, workforce development program providers, **state agencies administering adult education activities**, public housing authorities, or a partnership between any of the above.



## Community Anchor Institutions

“[A] public school, a public or multi-family housing authority, a library, a medical or healthcare provider, a community college or other institution of higher education, a State library agency, and any other nonprofit or governmental community support organization”



# Who Is Covered?

- **Covered Households:** at  $\leq 150\%$  of federal poverty level
- **Covered Populations:**
  - (A) individuals who live in covered households;
  - (B) aging individuals;
  - (C) incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility;
  - (D) veterans;
  - (E) individuals with disabilities;
  - (F) individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who—
    - (i) are English learners; and
    - (ii) have low levels of literacy;
  - (G) individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and
  - (H) individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.





# Implications for Immigrants and Refugees

DEA explicitly covers individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who—

- (i) are English learners; and
- (ii) have low levels of literacy

How do we identify and advocate for learners who fall into multiple covered categories?



# DEA Funding for Other Entities

## Digital Equity Competitive Grant (\$1.25B over five years)

- Will open after state capacity grants have been awarded
- Eligible to apply:
  - A political subdivision, agency, or instrumentality of a State
  - An Indian Tribe, an Alaska Native entity, or a Native Hawaiian organization
  - A foundation, corporation, institution, or association that is a not-for-profit entity and not a school
  - A **community anchor institution**
  - A local educational agency
  - An entity that carries out a workforce development program
  - A partnership between any of the preceding entities
  - A partnership between any of the preceding entities and an entity that the Assistant Secretary determines to be in the public interest; and is not a school (Cannot be or have been an administering entity under the Capacity Grant Program)



# World Education Comments on Digital Equity Act



# Best Practices for State Digital Equity Plans

- Focus on adopting technologies and integrating quality technology use for community members with inequitable access
- DEA work needs to complement broadband infrastructure work
- Include community anchor organizations who serve covered populations in core DEA planning leadership and the implementation process



# Best Practices for State Digital Equity Plans

- Include clear definitions of digital literacy and a focus on how learners will explicitly develop digital literacy and skills
- Support remote adult ESOL programming as a means of digital literacy skillbuilding for immigrants and refugees
- Prioritize and invest in existing trusted digital equity service systems



# Best Practices for State Digital Equity Plans

- Focus on mobile technologies
- Invest in [digital navigator](#) strategies
- Ensure equitable access by not making the eligibility criteria for other programs (e.g., WIOA, SNAP) a barrier to accessing digital equity services



## NTIA TA, Support, Requirements for State DEP

- Define measurable objectives and carefully craft accountability measures
- Bring WIOA and Perkins state plan partners to the table, and learn from their planning processes
- Convene a working group of state and local leaders to develop objective measures of digital skill gain – communities over vendors



# NTIA TA, Support, Requirements for State DEP

- Encourage and support community anchor institutions to embed digital inclusion services
- Leverage the work of the [IDEAL Consortium](#)
- Set targets for service to the covered populations, and recognize that many individuals fit into more than two categories





## Ensure DEP and BEAD Plans Are Complementary

- Use BEAD analysis in DEPs and ensure DEA services pick up where new BEAD infrastructure will leave off
- Have BEAD establish access, whereas DEA establishes adoption
- Explicitly note that that BEAD resources can be used to support DEA strategies



## Ensure DEPs Impact States' Goals and Outcomes

- Bring representatives of systems serving covered populations to the table
- Deeply invest in systems and strategies from established, diverse networks and partners
- Convene a working group of state and local leaders to develop objective measures of digital skill gain – communities over vendors



## Ensure States Consult Covered Populations

- Engage covered populations from the beginning, as well as the agencies that serve them (e.g., the Office of New Americans, TANF, WIOA partners)
- Mandate new technology-enhanced ways to engage the public for commenting



## NTIA Assessment of State Coordination

- States should articulate a shared vision of digital equity with local and regional leaders
- Use existing mechanisms from WIOA and Perkins state plans for engaging local and regional political entities
- DEP template can require documentation of county/city local plans and coordination

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# Call to Action

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## What You Can Do Now – Don't Wait!

- Connect to your state governor's office to ask who the administering entity will be
- Start building relationships with your state and local representatives/offices
- Start building relationships with potential digital equity partners – no one can do this work alone
- Educate your networks about the Digital Equity Act (Use these slides!)



# When the State Planning NOFO Comes Out (May 2022)

- **Advocate for**
  - Immigrants and refugees to be fully represented in the DEP
  - Community anchor institutions who serve covered populations to be at the planning leadership table and to receive funding
  - Existing, trusted models of digital equity services
  - All aspects of digital inclusion
- Look for State DEP guidance and talking points from WEI!



# Examples of Proven Digital Equity Service Models

- **Digital Navigators**

A service model with a one-on-one, comprehensive approach that “ensure[s] residents receive on-demand tech support and relevant information to secure connectivity and devices, as well as access to foundational digital skills.” Learn more: <https://digitalus.org/digital-navigators/>

- **Digitunity’s technology reuse model**

Digitunity collects and distributes used computers as a “no-cost or low-cost path to device ownership,” advocating for technology reuse as a solution to the digital divide. Learn more: <https://digitunity.org/>

- **Tech Goes Home**

TGH provides tailored computer and internet training to people of all ages, and provides participants who complete the training with a device and a year of internet service. Learn more: <https://www.techgoeshome.org/>





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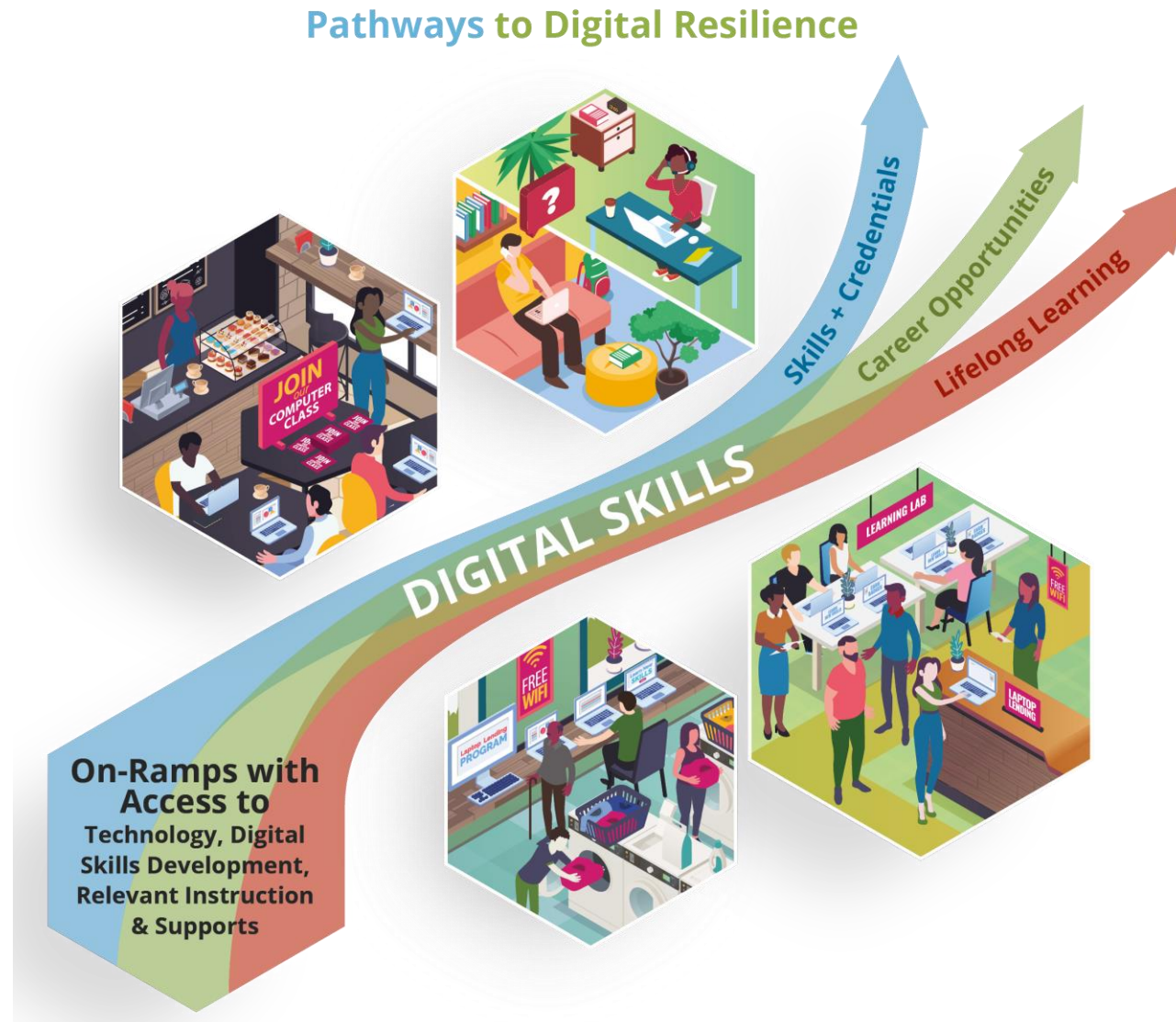
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# The Goal: Ecosystems for Digital Resilience



# The Goal: Ecosystems for Digital Resilience

In which stakeholders invest in technology access, digital and lifelong learning skills, and pathways to digital resilience **and also...**

## Employers

Create opportunities for their employees and communities to build digital skills

Develop partnerships and leverage technology to diversify and grow talent

## Government and Philanthropy

Invest in research, innovation, and capacity building for digital inclusion and skills development

## Education & Service Providers

Expand access to digital skills development through new delivery models

Leverage technology to improve service outcomes

## Tech Developers

Partner to create products that meet the needs of all learner-workers

