Washington State Department of Commerce

INTERNET FOR ALL IN WASHINGTON

Digital Equity Plan

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1.1 *UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL EQUITY IN WASHINGTON*

> "Access to broadband is the single most important economic development tool in our toolkit right now, and the most necessary to our state."
>
> –Governor Jay Inslee

The state of Washington has led digital equity efforts throughout various levels of governance — from state to local — to bring broadband services and digital skills to all. As a result, Washington state was the only state in the country to receive a perfect score on the State Digital Equity Scorecard when it was launched by the National Skills Coalition, the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, and Microsoft in 2021.[1] Washington state has also been at the forefront of convening an array of partners to solve major issues. During COVID-19, Washington state implemented the Internet Action Connectivity Team (IACT), which was a statewide collaboration of state agencies, county-, city-, and quasi-government organizations, special interest groups (i.e., AARP, veterans, and housing organization, etc.) and community-based organizations serving low income and historically underrepresented communities. To continue that legacy, the Washington State Legislature enacted legislation in 2022 that solidifies digital equity into the very framework of Washington's government by establishing a statewide broadband office, a digital equity forum, and by passing a state Digital Equity Act (HB 1723) that includes documenting and promoting digital equity among unserved and underserved communities. Legislation (HB 1336 and SB 5383) has also removed certain barriers to getting people connected, such as by allowing public entities to provide retail broadband services directly to end users. Moreover, the Washington State Office of Equity established digital equity as one of several determinants of equity, which are considered social conditions that "everyone in Washington needs to flourish and achieve their full potential."[2]

A diverse ecosystem of digital equity assets and champions has also sprung up from organizations that understand the advantages of connectivity for all members of society in Washington state; from local libraries providing low-income families with subsidized internet connection plans, to organizations empowering their communities by providing digital literacy workshops, and more. Washington state has seen an enormous, grassroot determination in providing people with the devices, skills, and internet connection they need to access the full benefits of the digital world. The Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO), within the Washington State Department of Commerce, continues to lead activities that will encourage, foster, develop, and improve affordable broadband. Activities include funding grants and programs such as the Digital Navigators Program, the Broadband Action Teams, State Broadband Matching Grants, and creating a Drive-in Wi-Fi Hotspot Finder during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another initiative has been the creation of a newly formed Digital Equity Unit (DEU), a team within the WSBO dedicated to addressing digital equity needs. The Digital Equity Unit's mission is to advance digital inclusion for all Washington residents to participate and collaborate online to thrive in today's global society. The DEU drives strategies, objectives, and performance through collaborative actions within the WSBO by promoting digital inclusion through affordable

[1] State Digital Equity Scorecard (2022). Accessed at: https://state-scorecard.digitalinclusion.org/scorecard/by_state/WA.
[2] Office of Equity Washington State (2023), State of Equity in U.S. and WA State. Accessed at: https://equity.wa.gov/us-plus/state/state-equity-us-and-wa-state.

access, internet connectivity, adoption, and digital skill building. Evidently, **Washington state is working together with a wide range of partners to reduce digital inequalities and increase digital inclusion over time.**

> "During the pandemic, medicine would come to my grandmother's door instead of her having to go the pharmacy. She was scared about getting sick. But Wi-Fi didn't work for her, so she wasn't able to let the [person dropping off her medicine] know whether she was home or not. So, it was difficult to have a service so important be in a language that wasn't her native language, and that needed Wi-Fi to access."
>
> —Sunnyside listening session participant.

In June 2023, President Biden's administration announced that Washington state will receive federal funding from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)'s Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and State Digital Equity Planning grant programs to expand high speed internet networks and digital equity programs statewide. Washington state consistently ranks among the best-connected state in the country, thanks to the hard work of digital equity champions throughout the decades. However, efforts continue, as there are still over 236,000 locations in Washington that lack broadband service.[3] Disparities exist throughout the state related to access to the internet — either based on the inability to pay, the inability to navigate resources for the adoption of services, the lack of broadband infrastructure in certain areas, the lack of access to digital hardware, or a combination of barriers prohibiting certain individuals from achieving digital access. This Digital Equity Plan illustrates how the funds received by the NTIA will work towards bridging the digital divide in Washington.

The Washington State Broadband Office and its engagement partners conducted public engagement activities throughout Washington state to hear directly from communities on the barriers and needs related to accessing, affording, and adopting broadband. Although additional outreach is still needed, to date, the WSBO has hosted more than 30 events and engaged over 3,400 Washington residents between the summer of 2022 and 2023. While this number is not statistically representative of Washington state's entire population, the WSBO's outreach was intentional about hearing from underrepresented and under-resourced communities from a multitude of different regions. Public engagement activities were held in person across Washington at libraries, food banks, festivals, bus routes, school buildings, health centers, and community centers, and virtually, to allow for various avenues for engagement. The WSBO also worked with community-based organizations, Broadband Action Teams (BATs), and other agencies to help with outreach. Local and tribal governments were encouraged to create Community Action Plans (CAPs) that detail specific assets, barriers, and potential solutions for their counties. These CAPs were integrated into this Digital Equity Plan to reflect unique local and tribal community needs and strategies. Additionally, as per the NTIA's requirements and per Washington State's House Bill 1723, public engagement was also tailored to reach historically unserved and underserved communities, or "covered populations."[4]

[3] Underserved location analysis from FCC v2 fabric data for Washington state.

[4] Covered populations are defined in the Digital Equity Act Planning Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) as: 1) individuals who live in covered households (income no more than 150% of the federal poverty level); 2) Aging individuals; 3) Incarcerated individuals; 4) Veterans; 5) Individuals with disabilities; 6) Individuals with a language barrier; 7) Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and 8) Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.

The WSBO centered the stories told by covered populations to develop this Digital Equity Plan, as they might face numerous compounding barriers to accessing the internet. Based on the findings from the WSBO's public engagement, this Digital Equity Plan categorizes Washington-specific barriers as either one that is most prevalent for a covered population, or a systemic barrier that is beyond the control of any individual. As such, barriers to accessing the internet, devices, and digital skills training were due to either systemic issues such as a lack of permanent housing or limited access to transportation, or due to a defining part of their lived experience such as having limited English proficiency or a disability. Unaffordable and unreliable services were also a barrier across all covered populations, with many stating that one's zip code should not limit one's opportunities for affordable service.

It is also important to note that populations are not monolithic, and everyone has unique barriers and challenges that can impact their experience with accessing, affording, or adopting broadband services and digital skills. Consequently, the analysis in this document of Washington-specific barriers is sensitive to the intersectional needs of Washingtonians. To continue expanding and strengthening the WSBO's understanding of communities and individuals across Washington, public engagement will be ongoing and integrated as a method to measure the success of statewide initiatives to bring internet to all. Continuous steps for engagement will build upon the lessons learned from the WSBO's initial public engagement period for this Digital Equity Plan and identify where there are opportunities to improve. The WSBO will work to ensure that outreach methods will be culturally and linguistically appropriate and tailored to the communities they intend to engage. By being sensitive to competing priorities and providing more sessions at different times of the day, by plugging into established community gathering events, and by using trusted avenues of communication, the WSBO intends to continue incorporating the diverse voices of Washington through ongoing public engagement and is open to building more partnerships and suggestions on ways to improve. The state is committed to addressing these barriers by designing actionable, tangible, and sustainable strategies that will be detailed in the following sections of this Digital Equity Plan.

> "Access to the internet is essential to participating in modern day society including, but not limited to, attending school and work, accessing health care, paying for basic services, connecting with family and friends, civic participation, and economic survival."
>
> -House Bill 1723 (Digital Equity Act)

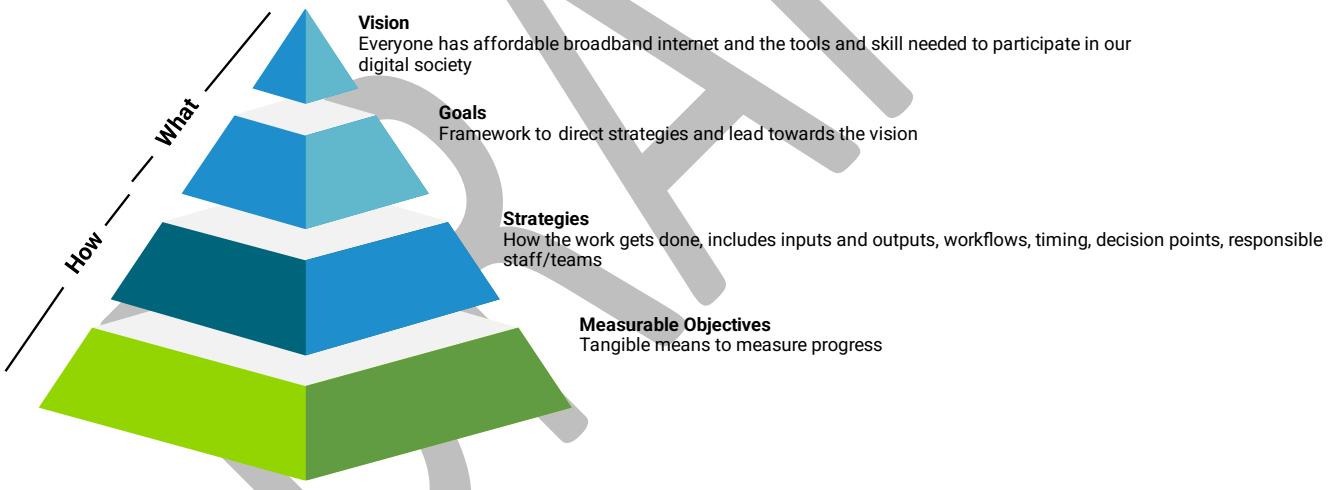
1.2 CHARTING A COURSE TO REACH OUR DIGITAL EQUITY GOALS

While there remain multiple barriers to reaching digital equity, this Digital Equity Plan acknowledges that there are many highly engaged community leaders and partner organizations who have invested in offering digital inclusion activities and advancing digital equity policies to help their communities access, afford, and adopt internet services and information technology. Through extensive conversations in 2022, the state's Digital Equity Forum developed a vision for digital equity that is adopted in this document, as well as by the newly created Digital Equity Unit in the Washington State Department of Commerce:

> *Everyone in Washington has affordable broadband internet technology as well as the tools and skills needed to participate in our digital society before 2028.*

Strategies that help define how the work will be completed and measurable objectives that can be used to measure progress will serve as building blocks for achieving goals and the broad vision for digital equity in Washington state, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Vision, goals, strategies, and measurable objectives framework



1.2.1 Goals

Three primary goals will serve as the guideposts for the strategies and reflect themes captured during the public engagement, which are to:

1. **Eliminate barriers** to access and affordability.
2. **Empower residents** with the information and digital skills they need to thrive.
3. **Ensure sustainability** of digital equity programs.

Eliminate Barriers	Empower Residents	Ensure Sustainability
Provide Washington residents with infrastructure, devices, and tools, to maintain reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband service to bridge the digital divide.	Provide Washington residents the information, support, and skills to obtain and cultivate digital knowledge and skills to improve access to reap the benefits of digital inclusion	Establish and build partnerships needed to deliver and sustain broadband service and support programs for learning and engaging in civil society.

1.2.2 Strategies

There are five strategies that will be employed, and tracked by measurable outcomes, in the delivery of Washington state's ambitious goals:

1. Expand broadband availability and increase affordability,
2. Implement innovative approached to expand options for device availability and affordability,
3. Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity,
4. Provide services that promote digital literacy, and
5. Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security.

Strategies for the state of Washington have been developed based on their ability to align with large-scale statewide efforts already in motion to improve outcomes for economic and workforce development, education, health, civic and social engagement, and the delivery of essential services.

Each strategic category will have associated activities to help accomplish the strategy with metrics for progress that are detailed in **Section 2.2.4** Strategy and Objectives and **Section 5.1** Strategy and Key Activities. **Chapter 5** will also dive into the way's Washington state will measure strategies' success, mitigate their risks, and ensure their sustainability in the long term. A summary is provided below with strategies mapped to the goal that they support.

Table 1: Summary of Strategies, Objectives, Activities, and Goals

VISION	*Everyone in Washington has affordable broadband internet technology as well as the tools and skills needed to participate in our digital society before 2028.*		
GOALS	1. Eliminate barriers to access and affordability.	2. Empower residents with information and digital skills they need to thrive.	3. Ensure sustainability of digital equity programs.

STRATEGIES & OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES
Strategy 1: Expand broadband availability and increase affordability. • **Objective 1:** Enabling Washingtonians to have the opportunity to access and afford broadband service.	• Monitor Washington state BEAD investments to ensure alignment with digital equity goals. • Support Washington CAIs to improve / increase the number of free, public Wi-Fi locations. • Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in subsidized broadband service for low-income communities. • Utilize Washington state Digital Equity Dashboard to identify gaps in broadband services for covered populations. • Solicit innovative solutions that can increase broadband affordability and adoption among hard-to-reach covered populations.
Strategy 2: Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability. • **Objective 2:** Ensuring that Washingtonians can access and afford the devices needed to maintain digital connectivity.	• Leverage existing partnerships to develop innovative or proven programs like statewide device recycling programs to increase affordability • Partner with ISPs, CAIs, and device distributes to co-develop awareness and marketing campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile network/hotspots, and free or low-cost device programs • Increase awareness and availability of mobile networks, hotspot distribution programs, free or low-cost device distribution programs
Strategy 3: Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity. • **Objective 3**: Supporting practices that allow access to digital services regardless of language, identity, or other factors.	• Partner with trusted messenger programs and organizations to share information about digital assistance and online accessibility with covered populations.
Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy. • **Objective 4:** Ensuring that Washingtonians have opportunities to acquire the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity activities.	• Build upon lessons learned and consortium of Washington State Digital Navigator Program to expand digital literacy programs designed to address unique needs of covered populations. • Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to expand community partnerships that provide increased knowledge and skills enabling covered populations to participate in changing workforce needs. • Build on existing partnership with OSPI to implement innovative and proven approaches to expand student and family involvement in digital literacy services.
Strategy 5: Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security. • **Objective 5**: Advancing measures that keep Washingtonians safe and protected online from cyber threats.	• Support the Statewide Cybersecurity Strategy to protect data and privacy of covered population online. • Partner with internet service providers to promote cybersecurity standards. • Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to conduct outreach and engagement, provide in-person trainings, and tools and educational resources related to online privacy and cybersecurity.

OUTCOMES

Access to telehealth services	Reduced education barriers	Digital upskilling of workforce	Digital civic engagement	Accessible online essential services

1.2.3 Measuring success

As strategies are implemented, it will be important to measure progress from the current baseline to desired outcomes on a year-to-year basis over the course of five years. The WSBO will use data already available through various data sources including American Community Survey (ACS) data, Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) data, and state data sources to establish a baseline and broken out by covered population where possible. These measurable objectives will eventually be incorporated into a digital equity dashboard that the state is currently developing, although not all measures may be included in the first version of the dashboard. Baseline numbers and further explanation of these objectives will be provided in **Chapter 2** of this Plan. Key performance indicators (KPIs) associated with measurable objectives include:

1. The number of Washington residents enrolled in ACP
2. The number of households with various types of digital devices
3. Number of partners participating in training related to online accessibility practices (no baseline currently available)
4. The number of covered populations enrolled in a digital literacy program
5. Tracking the number of existing language access policies per state agencies (no baseline currently available)

1.3 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The WSBO wants to emphasize that working towards the vision of digital equity is not something that can or should be done unilaterally. The WSBO intends to continue cultivating partnerships with organizations that are invested in digital equity work and to act as both a connector and a resource whenever possible. The WSBO will work in tandem with partners that include community anchor institutions, Digital Equity Forum, digital navigators, and local and tribal governments to accomplish the strategies and goals laid out in this Plan. The WSBO will continue to engage with and provide progress updates to communities through the outreach and engagement plan described in **Chapter 4**. To accomplish this and do so with the level of trust that will be required, the WSBO intends to engage and compensate community leaders[5] when possible, in facilitating ongoing conversations and holistic, considerate, inclusive input gathering.

Implementation of several strategies identified in **Chapter 5** is already underway and will be coordinated with Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program-related activities. WSBO's fiscal year 2023 Digital Navigator Program contracted with 32 partners which resulted in 103,532 devices distributed, 152,682 individuals assisted, and 112,773 households provided with a suite of digital navigation services. For example, approximately $14.7M has been made available for the second cohort of digital navigator service providers to be announced in the coming weeks.

While there is a great deal of work that remains, progress is already being made. **This work will benefit from the input of many voices across Washington state. The WSBO encourages the public to submit their feedback by visiting the Internet for All in Washington website.**

[5] The WSBO will follow community compensation guidelines outlined by the Office of Equity.

2. INTRODUCTION & VISION FOR DIGITAL EQUITY

Washington state's Digital Equity Plan was created to design strategies that respond to the needs of diverse communities to bridge the digital divide in Washington state. While resources such as libraries and citywide technology needs assessments[6] have been operational at the local level, COVID-19 exposed the gaps and barriers to digital connectivity and the need to have a statewide strategy to ensure that Washingtonians have access to broadband services in the quickly changing digital environment. While many communities were able to transition work, school, or other social needs online, some diverse communities were excluded and unable to participate in the digital society due to systemic challenges such as lack of adequate infrastructure as well as unique needs such as difficulties utilizing technology. This Plan seeks to combat these challenges and provide a pathway for all Washingtonians to have the opportunity to benefit from broadband and information technology.

2.1 *VISION*

The 2019 legislation established the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) with the purpose to promote, develop and improve affordability and quality of internet connectivity that will increase services for residents, businesses, and communities across the state.[7] Through initiatives such as the Digital Navigators Program, the WSBO has also organized an ecosystem of state agency partners and community organizations to provide digital skills and services to increase digital inclusion within Washington state.

Through extensive public engagement, starting in 2022 and continuing through the summer of 2023, the WSBO developed recommendations and a vision for digital equity in Washington state:

WASHINGTON STATE VISION	*Everyone in Washington has affordable broadband internet technology as well as the tools and skills needed to participate in our digital society before 2028.*

The WSBO has established three goals designed to achieve the stated vision.

- **Eliminating barriers:** Provide Washington state residents with infrastructure, devices, and tools, to maintain reliable, affordable, high-speed broadband service to bridge the digital divide.
- **Empowering residents:** Provide Washington state residents the information, support, and skills to obtain and cultivate digital knowledge and skills to improve access and reap the benefits of digital inclusion.
- **Ensuring sustainability:** Establish and build partnerships across Washington state needed to deliver and sustain broadband service and support programs for learning and engaging in civil society.

These goals will contextualize the strategies created by the state in an effort to bridge the digital divide in Washington.

[6] City of Seattle (2018), Technology Access and Adoption Study. Accessed at: https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Tech/2000_Final%20Summary%20Report.pdf.
[7] RCW 43.330.532 (2019). Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532.

This Digital Equity Plan will be focusing on three key components that assist with Washington's vision of equitable expansion of broadband services: access, affordability, and adoption. As this document delves into the needs assessment in **Chapter 3** and strategies in **Chapter 5**, these three pillars will guide the analysis and provide a framework to expand broadband and digital equity for all.

- **Access**: Sufficient infrastructure and coverage to deliver reliable, high-speed wired or wireless broadband services and technology tools.
- **Affordability**: An individual's ability to pay for the total cost of maintaining reliable, high-speed broadband services and technology tools.
- **Adoption**: The information, support, and skills to obtain regular, adequate access to reliable, high-speed broadband service and technology tools.

2.1.1 Measuring Digital Equity Success in Washington

While success starts with every Washingtonian having access to high-speed broadband, within the Digital Equity Plan, success also includes facilitating access that is equitable, affordable, and culturally inclusive to promote adoption among covered populations. Success in reducing digital inequalities will include creating sustainable avenues, strengthening partnerships, additional resources, and policies that address the unique needs of communities as well as offering opportunities to respond to new needs as they arise.

Ensuring equitable broadband services is critical to support economic growth, job creation, workforce development, educational outcomes, health outcomes, civic and social engagement, and delivery of essential services. For each of these areas, the overarching goals stated previously will help in the following ways:

Economic growth, job creation, and workforce development: Supporting the work of local workforce boards by increasing access to devices across underserved populations, increasing digital skills of Washington's current and future workforce, and by increasing the accessibility of state resources to workers.

Educational outcomes: Supporting the work of the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Washington Board of Education to integrate technology literacy and fluency in their curriculum, reducing barriers and advancing access to technology, including digital devices, internet connection, and digital skills training.

Health outcomes: Support the State Department of Health and the Healthcare Authority in expanding opportunities for Washingtonians to access telehealth services, reducing the need to travel long distances in rural areas for preventative and specialist care. Additionally, working to ensure culturally sensitive and linguistically accessible online healthcare resources and services.

Civic and social engagement: Working with state commissions (Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs (CHA), the Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA), the Commission on Asian Pacific American Commission (CAPAA) and others fostering civic and social engagement by ensuring that all individuals have access to resources and are empowered to participate in online civic activities.

Delivery of other essential services: Collaborating with state agencies to identify and implement ways to increase access to online services and devices with the assistance of digital navigations services, to enhance essential services. Collaborating partners could include WA State Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF), Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the Department of Corrections and local emergency services.

2.1.2 Digital Equity Alignment with the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Plan

The state of Washington is deeply committed to establishing digital equity throughout the state and has focused on building new programming capacity to advance digital equity ideas and strategies in conjunction with funding broadband infrastructure projects. Beginning in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 the WSBO has implemented numerous efforts to provide individuals and communities in Washington with the information technology capacity needed for full participation in the digital society and economy. As an example, in FY 2023, Washington State Legislature allocated to approximately $30 million for digital navigation programs as well as $4 million for the development of Broadband Action Teams (BATs) at the county and tribal levels, and an additional $4 million for the development of Community Action Plans by counties and tribes.

To increase digital equity, the WSBO worked with community organizations and libraries across the state to implement a Digital Navigator Program, providing direct assistance to those with the greatest need in terms of access to and knowledge of how to use technology devices and services. In accordance with the National Digital Inclusion Alliance definition of a digital navigator, they are "trusted guides who can assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices." Further, digital navigators help individuals sign up for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) funded Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a program designed to connect people to the internet and digital devices.

These pre-existing digital equity efforts are the foundation for the development of both the State Digital Equity Plan and the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan, demonstrating the interdependence of digital equity and broadband expansion in Washington state. With this intrinsic linkage, the state of Washington is committed to ensuring that all residents, businesses, and communities have access to sustainable high-speed internet. This encompasses the covered populations as outlined by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), including individuals who are low-income, aging, incarcerated, disabled, veterans, and racial and ethnic minorities; individuals who have language barriers; and individuals from rural areas. This also encompasses Washington state's additional underserved populations, which include children and youth in foster care and individuals experiencing housing instability.[8]

As exemplified by Washington state's digital equity programming, community partnerships, and extensive public engagement efforts, the state views digital equity as an essential component to full broadband coverage. In short, Washington state seeks to increase broadband access in the state for speed and accessibility, while simultaneously increasing affordability, adoption, and digital skills training for covered populations.

[8] Washington State Legislature (2022). Washington Digital Equity Act HB1723. Accessed at: HB 1723 -2021 - 22.

2.2 *Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes*

An objective for this Digital Equity Plan is to align with the driving factors behind current state efforts and investments to maximize positive outcomes for Washingtonians. This includes an understanding of state efforts driven by the Governor's five priority goals, the Washington State Legislature, as well as regional, local, and tribal near-term and long-term objectives for their communities.

GOVERNOR INSLEE'S FIVE PRIORITY GOALS

Executive Order 13-04 states that, "Washington state and its public servants are committed to the continuous improvement of services, outcomes, and performance of state government, to realize a safe, beautiful and healthy place to live and work."[9] To build toward this vision, in 2013 Governor Inslee proposed five priority goals for the state of Washington: (1) World-Class Education; (2) Prosperous Economy; (3) Sustainable Energy and a Clean Environment; (4) Health and Safe Communities; and (5) Effective, Efficient, and Accountable Government.[10]

These five priority goals have shaped the areas where the state decides to invest and has directly influenced the expedited need for broadband infrastructure. Access to broadband is critical to full participation in society and the modern economy, as the Washington State Legislature declared during their 2019 Regular Session.[11] For example, in order to achieve a world-class education, Washingtonians should have access to online schooling, and the plethora of online educational resources that can prepare them to succeed professionally in job or career, socially in the community, and personally as a lifelong learner. Next, a prosperous, modern economy relies on the prospect of technological advancement, innovation, and a trained workforce—all achievable only through the expansion of broadband access and the skills and knowledge to benefit from a digital society. Additionally, fostering the health of Washingtonians can be substantially improved through the expansion of telehealth services and access to medical or wellness resources that can be found online. Being able to utilize the benefits that come from internet connectivity will advance the state's five priority goals that drive decisions and investment.

[9] State of Washington: Office of the Governor (2013), Executive Order 13-04: Results Washington. Accessed at: https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe_order/eo_13-04.pdf.

[10] State of Washington: Office of the Governor (2013), Executive Order 13-04: Results Washington. Accessed at: https://governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/exe_order/eo_13-04.pdf.

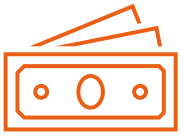
[11] Second Substitute Senate Bill 5511 (2019). Accessed at https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5511-S2.SL.pdf?cite=2019%20c%20365%20%C2%A7%201.

WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

The Washington State Legislature highlighted the importance of increasing broadband access and digital equity in several ways:[12]

Access to broadband is critical to full participation in society and the modern economy

Increasing broadband access to unserved areas of the state serves a fundamental governmental purpose and function and provides a public benefit to the citizens of Washington by enabling access to health care, education, and essential services, providing economic opportunities, and enhancing public health and safety



Achieving affordable and quality broadband access for all Washingtonians will require additional and sustained investment, research, local and community participation, and partnerships between private, public, and nonprofit entities

Extensive investments have been made by the telecommunications industry and the public sector, as well as policies and programs adopted to provide affordable broadband services throughout the state, that will provide a foundation to build a comprehensive statewide framework for additional actions needed to advance the state's broadband goals

Providing additional funding mechanisms to increase broadband access in unserved areas is in the best interest of the state

[12] RCW 28a.150.210 (2011). Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.150.210.

The Washington State Legislature consequently established the WSBO to "encourage, foster, develop, and improve adorable, quality broadband within the state," to help with job creation, promote innovation, improve economic vitality, and expand markets for Washington businesses.[13] Overall, the WSBO is dedicated to improving broadband access for unserved and underserved communities and population, working towards equitable development for all in Washington by bridging the digital divide.[14]

The WSBO's main objective is to ensure that Washington residents can access affordable and reliable high-speed internet. The Digital Equity Unit strategically implements collaborative actions to promote digital inclusion through affordable access, internet connectivity, adoption, and digital skill building. By 2026, Washington state hopes to provide 1/1 gigabit per second (Gbps) for all anchor institutions; and, by 2028, the goal is to achieve 150/150 Mbps for all residents and businesses.[15]

The WSBO's Mission:

"To enrich the lives of all Washington state residents and businesses by ensuring they have access to affordable, reliable, redundant and scalable/future proof broadband technologies ensuring the economic viability of both urban and rural Washington state today and into the future."

The WSBO also co-chairs the Digital Equity Forum (DE Forum), established in the 2021 Operating Budget, in close partnership with the Office of Equity to advance digital connectivity in Washington. To date, the Digital Equity Forum has engaged with approximately 3,000 Washington residents by holding public meetings, surveying efforts, listening sessions, and focus groups to hear from local communities and their lived experiences with barriers to digital equity.

The DE Forum includes representation from tribal governments, state agencies, and underserved communities, including historically disadvantaged communities.[16] The purpose of the DE Forum is to identify opportunities to advance digital connectivity for underserved communities, including historically disadvantaged communities throughout Washington state. The DE Forum's efforts are driven by their established commitment to accomplish the WSBO's state speed goals by:

- Strengthening public-private partnerships;
- Soliciting public input through public hearings or informational sessions;
- Working to increase collaboration and communication between local, state, and federal government and agencies; and
- Recommending reforms to universal service mechanisms.[17]

Washington state has invested and will continue to invest in the expansion of broadband and reducing digital inequalities to pursue the state's priority goals including improved education, healthcare, and economic vitality working with the DE Forum and other partners.

[13] RCW 43.330.532 (2021). Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532.
[14] Washington state Broadband Office (2023). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/.
[15] RCW 43.330.536 (2019). Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.536.
[16] Digital Equity Forum (2023). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-equity-forum/.
[17] Digital Equity Forum (2023). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-equity-forum/.

2.2.1 Inclusion of Community Action Plans

Washington state proactively considered the importance of integrating local efforts into statewide planning for their Digital Equity Plan by partnering with Washington State University-Extension (WSU-Extension) to provide technical assistance and providing up to $59K in funding to local Broadband Action Teams to support the creation of county-level digital equity plans, called "Community Action Plans" (CAPs). WSU-Extension assisted local governments and county representatives with creating their own, unique Community Action Plans, resulting in 39 counties and 11 tribes developing 50 plans to showcase the unique needs of their communities and solutions to achieve digital equity. The CAPs were developed first and foremost to support communities in defining and leading the solutions pathway to address their broadband and digital equity gaps. Additionally, these plans have informed the statewide Digital Equity Plan including location data and community input, digital inclusion assets, and a needs assessment with recommended strategies and solutions for achieving digital equity within their locality. Findings from each county and tribal CAP have been woven throughout this document.

2.2.2 Coordination of BEAD and Digital Equity Planning

The state will ensure that efforts related to the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan are coordinated with the activities in the Digital Equity Plan. The WSBO's staff will manage BEAD funding and provide oversight of the Digital Equity Act funding and activities. The WSBO's leadership team will continue to develop relationships among organizations receiving private and federal funding for digital inclusion activities, leveraging existing relations among the Digital Equity Forum and regional networks and organizations listed in **Section 3.1**.

Relationship building and maintaining open lines of communication with the diverse array of organizations involved with digital equity efforts in the state will be an important aspect of the WSBO's funding coordination strategy.

2.2.3 Using the Digital Equity Plan to Further Broader Goals and Efforts in the Following:

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Washington Workforce Association (WWA) is the membership organization for the local workforce development boards of Washington state. WWA provides information, training, tools, and recommendations to policy makers, workforce development professionals, Local workforce development board members, and the community at large to help make informed decisions about how to invest in workforce strategies. The organization also designs and implements programs and initiatives for workforce development that help job seekers gain the skills they need to earn long-term income and achieve financial stability while advancing industries that generate economic growth for the state.[18]

Washington state has 13 local workforce development boards, shown in **Map 1**, that work to coordinate and leverage workforce investments and strategies to advance the economic health of their respective communities by upskilling and reskilling individuals to form a trained and competitive workforce.[19] Local workforce development boards additionally work to identify

[18] Washington Workforce Association (n.d.). Accessed at: https://washingtonworkforce.org/.
[19] Washington Workforce Association (2023) Accessed at: https://washingtonworkforce.org/lwdb-directory/.

trends in the labor market to provide people with the best information on career pathways and investments that work to maximize long-term equitable and successful outcomes.[20] Local boards, in collaboration with the state Employment Security Department, the Governor's Office, and the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTB) created an ongoing, adaptable $13.8 million fund, the Economic Security for All Expansion.[21] The dedicated funding will support the work of local boards by expanding investments into job training and certification programs, intensifying focus on and outreach to at-risk and underserved populations, and aiding in poverty prevention efforts.

Some local boards have explicit commitments to racial equity and the provision of culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services, with an emphasis on advancing digital equity so that participants have access to internet-enabled devices, broadband internet, and digital literacy training.[22] Access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband is considered crucial in Washington's ability to increase wages, enhance productivity, and develop new and skilled talent. The strategies in this Digital Equity Plan will align with WWA activities to further improve the outcomes of the efforts generated by the local boards by increasing access to devices across underserved populations, increasing digital skills of Washington's current and future workforce, and by increasing the accessibility of state resources to potential laborers.

Map 1: Washington state Local Workforce Development Boards[23]

[20] Washington Workforce Association (2023.
[21] Washington Workforce Association (2023).
[22] Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County (n.d.) Accessed at: https://www.seakingwdc.org/.
[23] Washington Workforce Association (2023), Find A Local Workforce Development Board in Your Area. Accessed at: https://washingtonworkforce.org/lwdb-directory/.

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) is a nine-member, governor-appointed board. They are responsible for administering the Community and Technical College Act and providing leadership and coordination for Washington state's system of 34 public community and technical colleges.[24] The Community and Technical College Act created an independent system of affordable colleges to serve all Washingtonians regardless of their background or experience, with an emphasis on basic skills and literacy education, occupational education, and technical training to prepare students for careers in a competitive workforce.[25] SBCTC offers a myriad of programs and courses for adults, including Adult Basic Education classes, Career Exploration and Launch classes, English as a Second Language classes, and Tech Prep classes that provide digital skills training for tech-based occupations. Additionally, community and technical colleges across Washington offer different types of degrees and certificates that align with the interests and needs of individuals seeking higher education, such as associate in arts or science degrees, professional technical certificates, and baccalaureate degrees.[26]

Applying to jobs, enrolling, attending, and participating in classes, and finding resources for workforce development and educational prospects require access to reliable internet services. Lack of a stable internet connection within a student's household can be a major barrier to completing educations course. Many students in Washington benefit from free Wi-Fi provided on college campuses but some students struggle to access the internet when off campus. Barriers also include lack of access to digital devices, such as computers and laptops, or the lack of digital literacy skills to navigate online platforms. Digital equity efforts supported by this plan will improve accessibility to broadband services, digital devices, and digital skills trainings in underserved and unserved communities. These efforts alignment and further support the work done by the SBCTC to encourage educational attainment for Washingtonians.

The WTB spearheads economic and workforce development in the state of Washington.[27] Their responsibilities include, but are not limited to, tracking the performance of the state's largest workforce programs, overseeing a workforce development system that includes 16 education and training programs, and supporting the continuous improvement of the state's workforce system by offering policy recommendations and administering innovative pilot projects.[28]

[24] Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2023). Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/about/.
[25] Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2023).
[26] Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2023).
[27] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023). Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/.
[28] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023).

The WTB's workforce system helps Washington residents find jobs, re-enter the workforce, or move ahead in their current careers.[29] Additionally, the WTB drafted and published Washington's four-year strategy for further advancing and strengthening their workforce development system. The Board's Talent and Prosperity for All (TAP) plan encompasses a wide range of employment, education, training, and related services and support to help workers secure and retain good jobs while providing businesses with skilled workers they need to economically grow within a global economy.[30] TAP's guiding principles for 2024–2028 are:

- Close economic disparities for marginalized populations;
- Comprehensive support for individuals with barriers to employment; and
- System-wide performance metrics and accountability.[31]

The WTB's strategic priorities include aligning economic development and growth efforts, improving opportunities for young people to transition to an economically successful adulthood, and to improve equitable access, mobility, and long-term economic success. While TAP will provide a roadmap to better economic outcomes for jobseekers, the Digital Equity Plan will assist with ensuring that their guiding principles are accomplished and that their strategic priorities come to fruition through the expansion of broadband infrastructure across the state. The planning process for digital equity in Washington has a focus on expanding access and eliminating barriers for covered populations, which will empower underserved individuals to access online resources, educational prospects, and to further improve opportunities for economic success and stability. This Digital Equity Plan and the strategies developed by the WSBO emphasizes the improvement and expansion of digital literacy skills training and workforce development for marginalized communities and under-resourced populations, which directly align with the TAP's strategic priorities for 2024–2028. The activities outlined in this Digital Equity Plan will also be aligned with workforce strategies described in the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan, which include strategies related to both helping meet deployment needs and digital upskilling of the workforce in Washington.

[29] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023). Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/planning-programs/washington-workforce-system/.
[30] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023). Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/planning-programs/washington-state-workforce-plan/.
[31] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023). Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TAP-Plan-one-pager-1.pdf.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The Washington Basic Education Act defines statewide goals for public school districts. A "basic education," as defined by the Washington State Legislature, is an evolving program of instruction that provides, "students with the opportunity to become responsible and respectful global citizens, to contribute to their economic well-being and that of their families and communities, to explore and understand different perspectives, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives."[32] The goals of each school district are to provide opportunities for every student to develop the skills essential to:

1. Read with comprehension, write effectively, and communicate successfully in a variety of ways and settings and with a variety of audiences;
2. Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history, including different cultures and participation in representative government; geography; arts; and health and fitness;
3. Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate technology literacy and fluency as well as different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems; and
4. Understand the importance of work and finance and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities.[33]

Notably, Goal 3 requires schools to "integrate technology literacy and fluency" in their curriculum, which has direct overlap with digital equity goals.

To help meet these goals, The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which supports and empowers students, educators, families, and communities through equitable access to high-quality K-12 curriculum, instruction, and supports, created the Educational Technology K-12 Learning Standards. The standards are designed to ensure that students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to achieve academic success by leveraging technology in classroom instruction. Students in Washington are expected to utilize technology to learn about the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of engaging in an interconnected digital world, to create new, imaginative solutions using computational tools, and to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning through online engagement. These standards complement statewide efforts to enhance instruction in digital citizenship and media literacy and standardize the use of technology through K-12 learning.[34]

Technology within educational curriculums is a requirement in Washington, as established by the Washington Basic Education Act and further detailed by the Educational Technology K-12 Learning Standard published by the OSPI. The standards have specific recommendations for how students can learn by leveraging technology from kindergarten through senior year of high school.

[32] Washington State Legislature (2011), Washington Basic Education Act. Accessed at: https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28a.150.210/.
[33] Washington State Legislature (2011), Washington Basic Education Act. Accessed at: https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28a.150.210/.
[34] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2018). Accessed at: https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/edtech/standards/pubdocs/k-12-edtech-standards-complete-2018.pdf.

Students are expected to access digital devices and develop digital literacy skills to then accomplish the standards outlined by the OSPI, which can only be possible through the expansion of broadband services. In order to ensure that school districts can accomplish these goals and the Educational Technology Learning Standards, broadband services are required for all schools, school district buildings, and importantly, into the homes of school-aged individuals to enhance their learning outcomes.

The Washington State Board of Education (SBE) is committed to academic attainment for every student, which requires access and opportunity gaps to be eliminated. These efforts narrow academic achievement gaps and eradicate disparities in student outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender identity, caste, and socioeconomics. The SBE works to ensure that equity in education is understood as a process to identify and eliminate structural and institutional racism--manifested through existing policies, practices, and procedures--that reinforce predictably disparate educational outcomes.[35] Additionally, the OSPI strives to support migrant and multilingual students by providing tools, resources, guidance, and other supports to counter the academic challenges created by educational disruption and cultural/language problems.[36] The U.S. Department of Education and the Washington State Legislature provide funding to the OSPI to assist with supporting the education of students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care by encouraging innovative practices that reduce educational disruptions, strengthen school stability, and improve academic performance.[37]

Washington state's education departments and agencies focus on reducing barriers for underserved populations and under-resourced communities. Strategies in this plan will also aim to enhance the efforts to reduce barriers and advance access to technology, including digital devices, internet connection, and digital skills training.

[35] Washington State Board of Education (2023), Equity. Accessed at: https://www.sbe.wa.gov/about-us/equity.
[36] Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2023), Migrant and Multilingual Education. Accessed at: https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/migrant-and-multilingual-education.
[37] Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2023), Students Experiencing Homelessness. Accessed at: https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/students-experiencing-homelessness.

HEALTH OUTCOMES

The Washington state Department of Health (DOH) works with other healthcare providers to protect and improve the health of all people in Washington state. Their vision is to accomplish equity and optimal health for all by ensuring access to services, programs, opportunities, and information for all Washingtonians. Several resources have been created to advance their mission, including an Equity Impact Assessment tool, Language Access Planning tools, Ensuring Accessibility for People with Disabilities Report, and the Washington Tracking Network for mapping health disparities across the state.[38]

The DOH additionally strives to implement the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Healthcare_throughout their services.[39] The objective is to increase awareness, education, and outreach to address racial and ethnic minority health and health disparities problems, and to improve access to, and appropriate utilization of, health and other community-based services and systems through user-centered design for racial and ethnic minorities. Goals include culturally and linguistically appropriate services, service provider education and training, and increased workforce diversity.

Digital equity requires culturally sensitive and linguistically accessible online resources and services. This plan will work towards ensuring that health and wellness resources will be accessible for all populations throughout Washington, including individuals with language barriers, racial and ethnic minorities, and others with barriers to accessing online resources. Expansion of broadband services additionally will expand the opportunity for Washingtonians to access telehealth services—a service vital for rural communities that typically need to travel long distances for preventative and emergency health care. By improving access to reliable internet, this plan will enhance the objectives of the DOH: for equity and optimal health for all.

[38] Washington State Department of Health (2023), Health Equity. Accessed at: https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/health-equity.

[39] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (n.d.), Washington State Department of Health. Accessed at: https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/content.aspx?ID=10168&lvl=2&lvlid=51.

CIVIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Washington state has a robust network of state commissions, agencies, and organizations dedicated to encouraging civic and social engagement. Serve Washington, established in February 1994 by Executive Order 16-08, works to advance national service, volunteerism and civic engagement by expanding opportunities to meet local critical needs of residents of Washington.[40] Serve Washington published a 2020-2022 State Service Plan to set state priorities, and to serve as a mechanism to identify risks, capitalize on opportunities, and sustain and grow Washington's investment in service as a strategy.[41] The plan established a strategic direction and three goals to encourage volunteerism and civic engagement. The three goals are:

- By 2022, all 39 counties will directly benefit from national service or volunteer resources. This goal is to deepen the understanding of individual county needs and to make sure service resources such as funding, national service members, and/or volunteers, training events, service events, and leadership or program initiatives benefit all counties.
- Identify and remove barriers experienced by unserved and underserved communities to increase their participation in service and volunteerism.
- Partner with nonprofits, business, philanthropy, and government to develop additional resources and funding sources to grow our state's foundation of civic engagement with service.

Digital equity and inclusion efforts play a crucial role in fostering civic and social engagement by ensuring that all individuals have access to resources and are empowered to participate in online civic activities. Ensuring that service resources are available to everyone regardless of their background or location in Washington is essential for encouraging civic engagement, and for accomplishing Serve Washington's strategic goals.

[40] Serve Washington (2023), About Us. Accessed at: https://servewashington.wa.gov/about-us.
[41] Serve Washington (2020), State Service Plan for 2020-2022. Accessed at: https://servewashington.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/stateserviceplan_2020-2022_final.pdf.

Washington state has several commissions dedicated to encouraging and advocating for civic engagement from marginalized communities. For example, the Washington state Commission on Hispanic Affairs (CHA), the Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA), and the Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA) have endeavored to increase remote access to government functions, community action groups, civically empowering individuals within their communities to "access democracy." The CHA spearheaded a "Get Out & Vote" campaign to empower Hispanic citizens to participate in the democratic system by voting in local, state, and national elections.[42] The CAAA reaches out to the Black community and to government agencies to improve services to their community, to share information about programs, grants, and services, and to advance their Legislative Agenda that focuses on the special needs of the Black community.[43] The CAPAA has a 2023 Washington State Bill Tracker for certain focus areas that affect their community, including bills about health and human services, education, economic development, civil rights, and immigration.[44]

The world is increasingly digital, with access to information, participation in civic activities, government services and programs, and organizing and advocacy increasingly moving online. All Washingtonians should be empowered to engage civically with their communities and their state, yet the barrier to internet access have become a barrier to civic engagement. Online spaces for civic engagement assist with amplifying diverse voices—when people from diverse backgrounds have access to digital platforms, they can share their perspectives and experiences. Digital equity bridges the digital divide by providing access to technology and the internet to underserved communities—which is vital for commissions such as the CHA, CAA, and CAPAA as they attempt to reach their respective communities to empower them to engage democratically with the state of Washington.

DELIVERY OF OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) offers essential services to families and children across Washington state.[45] Most importantly, they are focused on the well-being of children. Their vision is to ensure that, "Washington state's children and youth grow up safe and healthy—thriving physically, emotionally and academically, nurtured by family and community."[46] DCYF oversees Child Protective Services' investigations, Family Assessment Response, licensed foster care, adoption support, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program for preschoolers, Working Connection Child Care, Home Visiting, juvenile rehabilitation programs, community facilities, and parole services, among other services for families, youth, and other service providers.[47]

[42] Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs (2022), Get Out and Vote Campaign. Accessed at: https://www.cha.wa.gov/2022-elections-get-out-vote-campaign.
[43] Washington State Commission on African American Affairs (2022), Our Activities. Accessed at: https://caaa.wa.gov/what-we-do/our-activities.
[44] Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (2023), CAPAA Tracker. Accessed at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q9NgEnowXlQxir4IeMb3oJNV2i7RBUOoHC_0SXKoukg/edit#gid=0.
[45] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/.
[46] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Mission, Vision, and Values. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/about/mission-vision-values.
[47] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Our Services. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services.

DCYF serves at-risk children and youth, with the goal of producing better outcomes in all Washington communities. Their Strategic Priorities for 2021-2026 focus on six priorities—one relating to equity, three relating to intentions for children, youth, and families, and two relating to building agency capacity to accomplish their work.[48] The DCYF aims to ensure assessments and programs are equitable across DCYF, and that all youth and families they serve have equal access to the essential services and assistance the agency can offer through state-funded programs.[49] Other goals include safely reducing the number and rate of children and youth in out-of-home care by half, promoting the education, economic security, and behavioral health of youth exiting foster care and incarceration, and creating a high-quality integrated "birth to eight" system for early childhood development.[50] Enhancing availability of services and supports is a goal that the DCYF has emphasized for each priority area. Many applications and enrollment into state-funded assistance programs have transitioned to online forms, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which requires families and youth to use the internet and a digital device to access these essential services, making it important for youth in foster care and their families to have reliable internet access.

A child's welfare additionally can be improved through the expansion of broadband services. With broadband connectivity, families can easily access online portals for social assistance programs, healthcare services, and educational resources. This can help families receive necessary aid in a timely manner, mitigating financial burdens and promoting economic security for the household. Broadband also helps with online learning, enabling children to access a wealth of educational materials, attend online classrooms, and interact with teachers and peers remotely. This enhanced educational access can bridge learning gaps and foster academic success for underserved children, regardless of their geographic location. Additionally, broadband can significantly impact behavioral health outcomes by providing access to mental health resources, counseling services, and support networks online. The availability of these resources can play a pivotal role in improving the well-being of children and their families, fostering better educational opportunities, economic stability, and emotional well-being.

The Washington state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is another state agency that provides essential services to Washingtonians.[51] Food, cash and medical services, housing assistance, child support, vocational rehabilitation, adult care, mental health and addiction services, and disability supports are all offered through the DSHS.[52] The 2023-2025 Strategic Plan for DSHS has future goals for each of their administrations.[53] **Table 2** shows that there are strategic objectives for each administration that can be enhanced and strengthened by the expansion of broadband services and digital equity efforts:

[48] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Strategic Plan. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/strategic-plan.
[49] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Strategic Priorities for 2021-2026. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/sites/default/files/pubs/COMM_0058%20DCYF_Strategic_Priorities_2021-2026.pdf.
[50] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Strategic Priorities for 2021-2026.
[51] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/.
[52] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/.
[53] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Strategic Plan Guide for 2023-2025. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/2023-2025-strategic-plan-guide.

Table 2: Essential Service Category from DSHS Strategic Plan that Align with Digital Equity

Essential service category	Strategic Objective	Digital Equity
Aging and long-term support administration[54]	Provide assistive communication technology services.	Digital equity is essential for providing assistive communication technology services to all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, physical abilities, or geographic location. It ensures that individuals with disabilities have access to the necessary devices and tools needs to benefit from technology.
Behavioral health administration[55]	Provide culturally appropriate services and programming for Native American patients within BHA facilities.	Digital equity includes ensuring culturally appropriate services and online programming for all races and ethnicities, including for Native American individuals in Washington.
Development disabilities administration[56]	Support individuals with developmental disabilities to be able to receive services that support them in living in their own communities rather than in facility-based settings.	Digital equity plays a crucial role in ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities can access and take advantage of support services offered by state agencies with little to no barriers, including barriers to assistive technology, internet access, and digital devices.
Division of vocational rehabilitation[57]	Improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.	Digital equity can improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities by expanding access to workforce development programs and skills-training tailored to their experiences and abilities.
Economic services administration[58]	Continue to improve on our modern, mobile work environment by optimizing telework options, supporting flexible work schedules, and minimizing office footprints.	Digital equity and, consequently, the expansion of broadband will assist with enhancing the outcomes of improving DSHS's mobile work environment by ensuring that all staff members have the tools they need to access it at home and in the workplace.
Facilities, finances, and analytics administration[59]	Increase efforts to build an equitable, diverse, accessible, and inclusive work environment.	Digital equity, within this plan, will work towards ensuring that all government agencies have an accessible and inclusive work environment by expanding on the tools and resources necessary for all individuals to benefit from internet connectivity.

[54] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Aging and Long-term Support Strategic Goals. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/aging-and-long-term-support-strategic-goals.
[55] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Behavioral Health Strategic Goals. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/behavioral-health-strategic-goals.
[56] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Developmental Disabilities Strategic Goals. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/developmental-disabilities-strategic-goals.
[57] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Vocational Rehabilitation Strategic Goals. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/vocational-rehabilitation-strategic-goals.
[58] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Economic Services Strategic Goals. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/economic-services-strategic-goals.
[59] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Facilities, Finances, and Analytics Administration Strategic Goals. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/office-of-the-secretary/facilities-finance-and-analytics-strategic-goals.

2.2.4 Strategy and Objectives

To close the digital divide in Washington, the state has identified key strategies aligned to measurable objectives in these categories:

1. **Broadband availability & affordability:** Ensuring that all Washingtonians have the opportunity to access and afford broadband service.
2. **Device availability & affordability:** Ensuring that all Washingtonians are able to access and afford the devices needed to maintain digital connectivity.
3. **Online accessibility & inclusivity:** Ensuring that all Washingtonians are able to utilize digital services regardless of language, identity, or other factors.
4. **Digital literacy:** Ensuring that all Washingtonians have the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity.
5. **Online privacy & cybersecurity:** Ensuring that all Washingtonians are safe and protected online from any cyber threats.

For each of the measurable objective categories, the state has identified Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), baseline data, and near and long-term targets, detailed in the table below. Where available, the state will analyze data specific to each covered population to measure the performance of each strategy. Together, this information will be important to understanding progress towards the goals of ensuring equitable access, affordability, and adoption for all Washingtonians.

Each of the measurable objectives have overarching strategies that further close the digital divide, detailed in the table below. These strategies will have actions, potential partners and considerations further detailed in **Chapter 5**.

STRATEGIES FOR EACH OBJECTIVE

Strategy 1: Expand broadband availability and increase affordability.

- Monitor Washington state BEAD investments to ensure alignment with digital equity goals.
- Support Washington CAIs to improve / increase the number of free, public Wi-Fi locations.
- Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in subsidized broadband service for low-income communities.
- Utilize Washington state Digital Equity Dashboard to identify gaps in broadband services for covered populations.
- Solicit innovative solutions that can increase broadband affordability and adoption among hard-to-reach covered populations.

Strategy 2: Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability.

- Leverage existing partnerships to develop innovative or proven programs like statewide device recycling programs to increase affordability
- Partner with ISPs, CAIs, and device distributes to co-develop awareness and marketing campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile network/hotspots, and free or low-cost device programs
- Increase awareness and availability of mobile networks, hotspot distribution programs, free or low-cost device distribution programs

Strategy 3: Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity.

- Partner with trusted messenger programs and organizations to share information about digital assistance and online accessibility with covered populations.

Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy.

- Build upon lessons learned and consortium of Washington State Digital Navigator Program to expand digital literacy programs designed to address unique needs of covered populations.
- Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to expand community partnerships that provide increased knowledge and skills enabling covered populations to participate in changing workforce needs.
- Build on existing partnership with OSPI to implement innovative and proven approaches to expand student and family involvement in digital literacy services.

Strategy 5: Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security.

- Support the Statewide Cybersecurity Strategy to protect data and privacy of covered population online.
- Partner with internet service providers to promote cybersecurity standards.
- Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to conduct outreach and engagement, provide in-person trainings, and tools and educational resources related to online privacy and cybersecurity.

Table 3: Key Performance Indicators

Objectives	KPI	Baseline	Near Term Target[60]	Long-term Target[61]
1. Enabling Washingtonians to have the opportunity to access and afford broadband service	Number of WA residents enrolled in ACP by covered population Number of households with internet subscriptions by covered populations	ACP enrollment by covered population internet subscription by covered population, where available 270,000 currently enrolled[62]	Increase ACP[63] enrollment by 9%	*To be further developed*
2. Ensuring that Washingtonians can access and afford the devices needed to maintain digital connectivity.	Number of households with devices broken out by covered population	Device distribution by covered population, where available 106,000 devices distributed in FY 2023	*To be further developed*	*To be further developed*
3. Supporting practices that allow access to digital services regardless of language, identity, or other factors.	Number of partners participating in training related to online accessibility practices	Exact number to be determined	*To be further developed*	*To be further developed*
4. Ensuring that Washingtonians have opportunities to acquire the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity activities.	Number of covered populations enrolled in programming	Digital navigator 2023 enrollment number served 230,000 total served in FY2023	*To be further developed*	*To be further developed*
5. Advancing measures that keep Washingtonians safe and protected online from cyber threats.	*To be further developed*	Exact figures to be determined	*To be further developed*	*To be further developed*

[60] Defined as goals within 1-2 years.
[61] Defined as goals within 3-5 years.
[62] Universal Service Administrative Co. (July 2023), ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker. Accessed at: https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#enrollment-by-state
[63] ACP funds are forecasted to run out sometime in mid-2024, and Congress has not yet allocated additional funding. The state will require new data sources to measure affordability after 2024.

3. CURRENT STATE OF DIGITAL EQUITY: BARRIERS AND ASSETS

3.1 *ASSET INVENTORY*

Washington state is a recognized leader in digital equity initiatives; recent achievements include the enactment of Washington state's Digital Equity Act in 2022 and the formation of a statewide Digital Equity Forum in 2021. Collectively, the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO)'s work history will show their commitment in supporting Washington state residents in receiving increased access to internet connectivity and information technology.[64] Another example of the state's commitment to equitable access to technology is the K-20 Education network, established by state law in 1996, which is one of the nation's first statewide education networks connecting schools, higher education institutions, and libraries in addition to providing video and data services.[65] The City of Seattle has also been a trailblazer in digital equity, starting Technology Access and Adoption research in 2000[66] and being officially recognized as a "Digital Inclusion Trailblazer" from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance in 2022.[67] While technology has changed significantly in the last 20+ years, what has not changed is Washington's commitment to ensuring that access to technology and its benefits leads to digital equity for all—where all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in society and the economy.

Washington state's digital inclusion work has been supported and often led by a diverse, multi-faceted ecosystem of digital equity champions, from local non-profits, to cities, counties, public utility districts, higher education institutions, research teams, community anchor institutions, and state agencies engaged in digital equity. Washington state leverages many assets and partnerships, all of which contribute to broadband expansion and coverage, in closing the digital divide among the underserved and unserved populations across the state. Digital inclusion assets are defined as programs, activities, strategies, and technical assistance geared towards closing the digital divide and helping people get connected with, and to benefit from, the internet.[68]

[64] Washington state Department of Commerce (2022), Digital Equity Forum. Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-equity-forum/.
[65] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2019), K-20 Education Network. Accessed at: https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/bulletinsmemos/bulletins2019/B056-19Attach3.pdf.
[66] City of Seattle, Seattle Information Technology: Digital Equity. Accessed at: https://www.seattle.gov/tech/initiatives/digital-equity.
[67] City of Seattle (2022), Seattle Named a 2022 'Digital Inclusion Trailblazer.' Accessed at: https://techtalk.seattle.gov/2022/08/23/seattle-named-a-2022-digital-inclusion-trailblazer/.
[68] National Telecommunications and Information Administration (2022), Notice of Funding Opportunity State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program Executive Summary. Accessed at: https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf.

Assessing the current state of digital inclusion assets is foundational to understanding what current resources are available. This initial cataloging and evaluating of digital inclusion assets will directly contribute to developing a holistic understanding of current and emerging needs and gaps that Washingtonians struggle with in acquiring full access to the benefits of broadband connectivity. In **Section 3.2**, the Digital Equity Plan uses four primary methods to identify assets related to digital equity throughout the state, which are:

1. A comprehensive desktop literature review including reports and past survey results shared by stakeholders and partners,
2. An analysis of findings from the WSBO's public engagement activities to pull mentions of digital inclusion assets utilized by the public,
3. Key informant interviews with state agencies, departments, social services, and other digital equity champions in Washington to discuss digital equity programs, and
4. Community Action Plans submitted to the WSBO from county and tribal government's Broadband Action Teams (BATs).

STATEWIDE DIGITAL INCLUSION EFFORTS

In May of 2019, the Washington State Legislature stated that:

> *Increasing broadband access to unserved areas of the state serves a fundamental governmental purpose and function and provides a public benefit to the citizens of Washington by enabling access to health care, education, and essential services, providing economic opportunities, and enhancing public health and safety.*[69]

Washington state government has committed to providing additional funding mechanisms, sustaining research and investment into broadband infrastructure, and collaborating with private and nonprofit entities to increase broadband access in unserved and underserved areas.[70] The WSBO will be working closely with the recently formed dedicated Digital Equity Unit in collaboration with community partners, their BATs, and state partners to support digital equity work across the state.[71]

The state's efforts towards reducing access, affordability and adoption barriers have been cemented through the creation of several programs administered by the WSBO. As one example, the Digital Navigator Program has been very successful in reaching community members who need assistance with internet adoption and learning how to use computing devices and applications across all 39 counties.[72]

[69] Washington State Legislature (2021), RCW 43.330.532. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532.
[70] Washington State Legislature (2021), RCW 43.330.532. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532.
[71] Washington state Department of Commerce (2023), Washington Department of Commerce names Lisa Heaton to lead digital equity work. Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/news/lisa-heaton-to-lead-washington-state-broadband-office-digital-equity-work/.
[72] Washington state Department of Commerce, Digital Navigators Program (n.d.). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-navigator-program/.

3.1.1 Digital Inclusion Assets by Covered Population

Washington state has many existing digital inclusion assets offered by state, local and tribal governments, community-based organizations, non-profits, and public-private partnerships. Digital inclusion assets including coalitions representing all covered populations defined in **Table 4**, provide culturally relevant efforts to specifically meet the populations served, both of which are described in the following tables. These tables are non-exhaustive as there are often informal digital inclusion assets that communities self-organize, but they help to identify an example of the types of services offered and some of the organizations doing this critical work.

Covered populations as described in the Digital Equity Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and state Digital Equity Act include:[73]

Table 4: Covered Populations from the Digital Equity NOFO and State Digital Equity Act (HB1723)[74]

Aging Individuals	• Individuals 60 years and older.
Incarcerated individuals	• All persons in State prisons, local jails and other municipal confinement facilities, correctional residential facilities, and correctional facilities intended for juveniles.
Low-income "covered" households	• Households with income no more than 150 percent of the federal poverty threshold.
Individuals with language barriers	• This includes, a) English learners: Individuals who speak a language other than English at home and speak English less than "very well." b) Have low levels of literacy: Individuals below literacy proficiency.
Individuals with disabilities	• A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.
Racial and ethnic minorities	• Individuals who identify as a race other than White alone or as Hispanic or Latino of any race.
Rural inhabitants	• Individuals living in a jurisdiction with a population density less than 100 persons per square mile or in a county smaller than 225 square miles.
Veterans	• All persons aged 18 years and older who served in the armed forces in the past but are no longer on active duty.
Children and youth in foster care	• Someone under the age of 25 (in Washington) who has been removed from their home due to abuse or neglect by a parent or guardian.
Individuals experiencing housing instability	• Individuals and families are considered homeless if they do not have a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence — for example, if they are living in a shelter, vehicle, or other places not meant for habitation.

KEY Digital Equity NOFO | HB1723

[73] NTIA (2022), Notice of Funding Opportunity State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program Executive Summary. Accessed at: https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf.

[74] Washington State Bill Reports (2022), House Bill Report E2SHB 1723. Accessed at: https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bill%20Reports/House/1723-S2.E%20HBR%20PL%2022.pdf.

DIGITAL INCLUSION ASSETS COVERING MULTIPLE POPULATIONS

Washington state created many formal digital equity assets during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the Drive-in Hotspots, providing Washingtonians with free public Wi-Fi, computer labs, device lending programs, digital navigation support, and/or hotspots for temporary internet service.[75] There has also been an increase in informal programs implemented by agencies and organizations as a response to the needs of communities following the pandemic, as people struggled to find workarounds in gaining access to the internet for daily activities. Washington state's libraries have implemented programs such as digital navigators; and their physical locations are open and available to assist the community by providing public networks, devices, and staff that can provide in-person support.[76] **Figure 2** illustrates some examples of organizations offering general digital equity assets across the state. Some assets are considered to be critical resources for the population they locally serve, as further emphasized by the Community Action Plans. All Community Action Plans are located in **Appendix 7.3**.

Digital inclusion spotlight

As a result of COVID-19, the Department of Child, Youth, and Families (DYCF) expanded the responsibilities of case workers to assist families and youth with accessing internet resources including devices and internet connection, printing homework and other applications or documents, and other computer-based needs, for the children and families that did not have access to stable internet connections.

Figure 2: Examples of organizations providing digital equity assets

STATEWIDE DIGITAL INCLUSION ASSETS THAT SERVE MULTIPLE OR ALL COVERED POPULATIONS

In addition to the aforementioned places that people can seek assistance and access digital devices and resources, several other statewide digital inclusion assets are available to multiple populations**. Table 5** provides a non-exhaustive list of digital assets currently available across the state of Washington for multiple covered populations:

[75] Washington state Department of Commerce (n.d.), Drive-in Wi-Fi Hotspot Location Finder. Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-state-drive-in-wifi-hotspots-location-finder/.

[76] Asotin County Library (2022), Computers, Internet, and Technology. Accessed at: https://asotincountylibrary.org/computers-internet-technology/.

Table 5: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets Serving Multiple Covered Populations

Asset	Description	Covered Population
Association of Washington state Housing Authorities	Washington's 37 Housing Authorities build homes and run a variety of housing programs that support Washington's working families, children, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. They are important business partners throughout the state, contributing millions of dollars each year to our neighborhoods through rental subsidies. Several housing authorities provide subsidized to free Wi-Fi, digital navigation services, and computer labs for residents to use.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Computing for All	A program that seeks to break down cultural and systemic social barriers that prevent young adults of all races, genders, and abilities from exploring computer science as a potential career. These employer-mentored, project-based work programs support practicing the application of critical thinking and problem-solving to real-world work scenarios.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Digital Navigators Program	The Digital Navigator Program is a program of the WSBO and their community partners. Digital Navigators can help you navigate the internet, sign up for the Affordable Connectivity Program (federal low-income internet assistance), connect with government and community services, acquire digital literacy skills, and more.	All
Equity in Education Coalition	A statewide coalition working towards a more targeted and comprehensive approach to improve educational achievement and growth as well as closing the opportunity gap throughout the state of Washington, particularly regarding digital equity.	All
HopeSource	HopeSource moves people to self-sufficiency by providing access to education, employment, economic development, and vital services. They offer classes to support digital literacy skills and privacy and cybersecurity needs, public Wi-Fi, computer workspaces, programs to provide affordable personal devices, and assist with Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Literacy Source	Literacy Source partners with adults working to gain skills and education to create new opportunities for themselves, their families, and the community. The digital literacy program offers adult immigrants and refugees with low English language proficiency to improve their English skills while also learning basic digital literacy skills.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
SkillSource	SkillSource provides training and learning opportunities in North Central Washington to help people build new careers and help businesses develop. Eligible individuals can receive individualized, self-paced instruction in computer basics in the workplace, general digital literacy, Windows, and Microsoft Office applications. Eligibility for federal programs must be established prior to instruction.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants

Asset	Description	Covered Population
TechConnectWA	The TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk provides free technical support to Washington residents to help them engage in a virtual environment. It is the nation's first multi-lingual, multi-cultural help desk staffed by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) technicians that help callers navigate the internet, telehealth calls, and online access to food, rental assistance, and socio-emotional supports.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; people with language barriers; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Washington state Board for Community and Technical Colleges	The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges advocates, coordinates and directs Washington state's system of 34 public community and technical colleges. These institutions of learning often provide free Wi-Fi, computer centers, digital skills training, and workforce development courses related to technological skills.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
WorkSourceWA	WorkSource is a statewide partnership of state, local and nonprofit agencies that provides an array of employment and training services to job seekers and employers in Washington including in person computer skills training and virtual learning opportunities.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in the **Appendix 7.2**.

REGIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ASSETS THAT SERVE MULTIPLE COVERED POPULATIONS

Washington state has an immense network of organizations, such as non-profits, associations, coalitions, councils, foundations, and community action groups, which work to support, empower, and build resilience and self-sufficiency for several covered populations living within the area they serve. **Table 6** is a list of several digital inclusion assets specifically pertaining to a region, city, or locality. Washington state proudly supports multiple covered populations in their needs for accessing the internet. Again, this list is non-exhaustive, but illustrates the diversity of digital inclusion assets across the state.

Table 6: Regional Digital Inclusion Assets

Asset	Description	Covered Population
Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council	Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council is a private not-for-profit corporation primarily serving the residents of Chelan and Douglas Counties. They offer free digital literacy classes, sometimes with stipends/incentives for attendance. Classes offered to those who are in AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps, or who need digital literacy assistance, budgeting help, or help with English. The non-profit also provides device/mobile hotspot lending.	Low-income, people with language barriers
Coastal Community Action Program	The Coastal Community Action Program works with low-income individuals and families to remove barriers that prevent them from achieving economic stability in Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties.	Low-income households; aging individuals; racial and ethnic minorities
Community Action of Skagit County	Community Action of Skagit County works to stabilize the lives of low-income individuals and families by equipping them with the resources and assistance necessary, including digital literacy classes and job training courses. They additionally provide assistance with resource navigation to find options for low-income cell phones, low-income internet service providers.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Community for the Advancement of Family Education (CAFÉ)	CAFÉ is a non-profit organization that advances family and community growth through education. They serve their culturally diverse community by providing opportunities in leadership, civic and social engagement, literacy development, and academic advancement. The non-profit offers digital navigation services and assistance with enrolling in the Affordable Connectivity Program.	Racial and ethnic minorities; people with language barriers; low-income households
Digital Equity Learning Network of King County	Broad coalition of nonprofits, community anchor institutions, and local government (open to all) who meet to share resources and create workshops on best practices, funding and policy that impacts digital equity work and provides networking opportunities.	All

Asset	Description	Covered Population
Metropolitan Development Council (MDC)	The Metropolitan Development Council is a community action agency working against the tide of poverty by offering programs for behavioral health, housing, youth education, adult education, food assistance, energy assistance, and weatherization. They offer education and employment workshops, digital navigation for online applications, devices at a low-cost, mobile computer unit, computer classes, and online learning accounts through a NorthStar partnership.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
NCW Tech	NCW Tech offers a variety of programs for the community, including a Community Skills Initiative to provide free digital skills trainings, Computers for Community to provide computers to children in need, Project iLumina which is a rural resilience and digital inclusion campaign that brings resources to rural communities, and Tech Help to provide access to digital resources and the skills and support needed to engage online effectively for community members in need.	Low-income households; rural inhabitants
Partners in Careers	Partners in Careers is a non-profit organization that strives to create self-sufficiency through specialized job training and employment services, including computer basics, digital navigation assistance, and social service assistance.	Low-income households; racial and ethnic minorities; veterans
Pateros Brewster Community Resource Center (PBSRC)	PBSRC is a non-profit corporation that provides a location and infrastructure for community needs, including to connect families with critical resources including free public Wi-Fi, mobile hotspots, affordable digital devices, and a technology center with 16 laptops, four computers, scanners, printers, projectors, and other technological equipment.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation (UNA)	Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation protects and promotes the rights of immigrants, Latinx, and underrepresented communities through advocacy, support through services, and resources. UNA serves nine counties in Washington and provides digital navigation services and phone distribution.	Racial and ethnic minorities; people with language barriers; low-income households
WSU-Extension, The 4-H Tech Changers Program	4-H Tech Changemakers explore the impact of the digital divide in their communities, learn high value digital skills, and provide adults in underserved populations with the tools to find additional opportunities for employment through expanded access to digital skills training. 4-H Youth are helping adults find jobs, understand remote work, and how to access or adopt new technology.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

DIGITAL INCLUSION ASSETS BY COVERED POPULATION

3.1.1.1 Aging individuals

An "aging individual," as defined by the Digital Equity Planning Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity, is someone who is 60 years of age or older.[77] For the state of Washington, about 16% of the population is aged 65 and over according to the United States Census of 2020.[78] The Washington State Office of Financial Management estimates that approximately 27% of residents will be 65 or older by 2040.[79] The increase in this population is likely a result of favorable tax policies; no state income tax, no tax on social security and a property tax rate lower than half of the other states within the United States. People approaching retirement consider Washington state as a favorable place to retire.[80] The state additionally offers aging populations a plethora of resources and services to lead a safe and healthy life, including services to help adults remain at home, to find long-term care housing, to access adult protective services, to utilize wellness and fitness resources, and to support caregivers.[81]

Digital connectivity for aging individuals can also be crucial for health and wellness, as emphasized by several participants during the Internet for All in Washington focus groups. Participants mentioned during a focus group tailored to aging individuals, "Part of the issues too, is as you have an aging population, people need the internet to download the results of doctor appointments," and, "We have an older population, and having reliable internet is critical for people to be able to stay in their houses." Security, since alarm systems can only function while online, and safety, as life support services also need connectivity to remain online, turn access to broadband into a life-or-death situation for aging individuals.

According to the Pew Research Center, 41% of individuals over the age of 65 who live in the United States do not use the internet at all, 53% do not have broadband access at home, and 23% do not use cell phones.[82] Yet, the same report states that once seniors joined the online world, digital technology often became an integral part of their daily lives, in order to access information, remain in contact with close friends and family members, as well as to enjoy entertainment platforms, online books, podcasts, newsletters, and social media. During the Internet for All in Washington public engagement period, several seniors backed this finding with their comments, such as, "The internet is great – I can use it to Zoom with friends and shop online, or to read articles, watch TV, and check the weather." Another participant stated, "Keeping up with technology – that's a good feeling. I'd like to know more – I'm not afraid of it, I just need to be shown."

77 National Telecommunications and Information Administration (2022), Notice of Funding Opportunity State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program Executive Summary. Accessed at: https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf.
78 United States Census Bureau (2022), QuickFacts: Washington. Accessed at: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WA.
79 Office of Financial Management (n.d.), Population Estimates. Accessed at: https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates.
80 Tax Foundation(n.d.), Taxes in Washington. Accessed at: https://taxfoundation.org/state/washington/#:~:text=Washington%20Tax%20Rates%2C%20Collections%2C%20and%20Burdens&text=Washington%20has%20a%206.50%20percent,State%20Business%20Tax%20Climate%20Index.
81 State of Washington, Seniors. Accessed at: https://wa.gov/seniors.
82 Pew Research Center (2014), Older Adults and Technology Use. Accessed at: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/04/03/older-adults-and-technology-use/.

Some current digital assets uniquely designed to serve the aging population in Washington state are listed in **Table 7** below:

Table 7: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Aging Individuals

Asset	Description
Aging and Disability Services, Area Agency on Aging for Seattle and King County	The Aging and Disability Services partnered with senior center and senior housing providers to get tablets and hotspots to individuals who needed them during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and continues to provide "Community Living Connections," a free and confidential service to help find community resources and access support services.
Cyber-Seniors	Cyber-Seniors is a non-profit organization that provides senior citizens with tech training using an intergenerational, volunteer model. Young people are provided with lessons and learning activities to train them to act as digital mentors and senior citizens gain access to adequate technology training and intergenerational communities that keep them socially connected and engaged.
Kitsap Computing Seniors	Kitsap Computing Seniors is an all-volunteer organization for seniors who want to help increase each other's knowledge, skills and enjoyment of computers and technology. They offer digital literacy classes and training for seniors, as well as assist with device procurement and repair.
Olympic Area Agency on Aging	The Olympic Area Agency on Aging operates a Mobile Assistance Van (MAV) that travels throughout the county providing Information and Assistance. They serve as a single entry-point for services for disabled adults and seniors in Grays Harbor, Pacific, Clallam and Jefferson Counties in western Washington state. Additionally, they offer assistance with homebound seniors including pilots like ElliQ, to serve homebound seniors promotes safety, health, and physical and emotional well-being.
Senior Centers	Washington state has an extensive network of senior centers, which provide free Wi-Fi and staff who can assist with digital navigation services.
Sound Generations	Sound Generations is a multiservice nonprofit partnering with older adults to remove the inequities that impact aging by providing accessible, essential, and inclusive services; including in-kind donations of technology devices that would otherwise be unaffordable, as well as a network of affiliated senior centers that offer resource navigation at no cost to seniors.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.2 Incarcerated individuals

Washington state has around 13,000 individuals currently incarcerated within a state facility.[83] When it comes to the digital inclusion of incarcerated individuals in Washington state, there are several important factors to consider. The availability of internet access for incarcerated individuals has been a contentious topic of debate within legislative arenas and has seen new policy and changes over time. For example, prior to 2019, internet access had been prohibited for those incarcerated individuals amid concerns that those individuals could contact potential victims on the outside or use the internet for illicit activity.[84] However, in December of that year the state approved the use of secure websites allowing student justice involved individuals to use the internet for educational purposes without being able to access unapproved sites.[85] Therefore, the state of Washington is seeing a movement towards providing limited connectivity to incarcerated individuals for educational and rehabilitative purposes.[86] Officials from the state Department of Corrections aim to expand secure internet education to all incarcerated students in the state yet the effort is ongoing.

In Washington state, the Department of Corrections has implemented the Offender Management Network Information System (OMNI), which allows incarcerated individuals to access educational resources and job training material through computer terminals in prison libraries.[87] The system is primarily designed to assist with reentry preparation, as studies show that access to education and skills training reduces recidivism rates.[88] However, significant barriers to digital inclusion still exist for Washington state's justice involved individuals, including limited to no access to technology, restricted internet connectivity, and strict controls on online activity such has how much time they can spend on computer terminals and restricted content.[89] One of the biggest issues for activists spearheading increased connectivity for incarcerated individuals is the lack of available funding. For example, bringing internet connectivity to a state facility can be costly. Additionally, many incarcerated individuals and their families face individual financial constraints, struggling to purchase credits or use prepaid cards to access online resources.[90] Current digital assets serving incarcerated individuals in Washington state are as follows:

[83] Department of Corrections (2022), Statistical reports. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/information/data/analytics.htm.
[84] Department of Corrections (2021), Secure Internet Connections for the Purpose of Postsecondary Education and Training of Incarcerated Individuals. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=Secure%20Internet%20Budget%20Proviso%202021%20DOC%20Report%20to%20Legislature%20Final_13756220-25d1-4c22-bb7e-86f3d3e63879.pdf.
[85] The Seattle Medium (2021), Secure Internet Access Expands Horizons for Justice-Involved Individuals. Accessed at: https://seattlemedium.com/secure-internet-access-expands-horizons-justice involved individuals/.
[86] The Washington Post (2015), The Case for Internet Access in Prisons. Accessed at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/02/09/the-case-for-internet-access-in-prisons/.
[87] Department of Corrections, The Offender Management Network Information Project. Accessed at: https://leg.wa.gov/JointCommittees/Archive/SCTF/Documents/10-26_Omni.pdf.
[88] The United States department of Justice Archives, Prison Reform: Reducing Recidivism by Strengthening the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Accessed at: https://www.justice.gov/archives/prison-reform.
[89] Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2021), Corrections Education: Annual Report 2020-2021. Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/programs-services/corrections/fy-21-corrections-education-annual-report.pdf.
[90] Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2021), Corrections Education: Annual Report 2020-2021. Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/programs-services/corrections/fy-21-corrections-education-annual-report.pdf.

Table 8: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Incarcerated Individuals

Asset	Description
Department of Corrections, Legislative Directive ESSB 5092	ESSB 5092 allocates $1,156,000 for costs relating to a pilot program for expanding educational programming to include post-secondary degrees and to secure internet connections at up to three correction institutions.
Department of Corrections, Reentry Navigation Services	The Department of Corrections offers reentry navigation services which primarily include assisting people with completing their individual reentry plan and resource navigation, including how to access supportive services such as subsidized broadband plans and digital navigation.
Prison Scholar Fund	The Prison Scholar Fund is an organization dedicated to helping incarcerated individuals access to the education they need to transform their lives. The fund enacted a Digital Navigation and Workforce Development Reentry Support Program which provided free laptops and internet services to justice involved Washington state residents, while supplies lasted.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.3 Low-income households

According to federal definition in the United States, low-income households are determined based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG), published annually by the Department of Health and Human Services. The FPG considers household size and income level to determine eligibility for several assistance programs, including Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Head Start. As of 2023, an individual with an income of $14,580 is at the Federal Poverty Level. In comparison, a family of four with an income of $30,000 is also at the Federal Poverty Level.[91]

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services uses the FPG as a basis for determining eligibility for state programs.[92] However, Washington state also considers the local cost of living when determining income eligibility for certain state assistance programs.[93] In the state, low-income individuals represent a significant portion of the population, and their socioeconomic status can unfairly pose as a challenge for economic development and their general well-being.[94] When a substantial portion of the population struggles with poverty, it can hinder economic growth and stability.[95] Low-income individual often face barriers to education, employment opportunities, and access to healthcare, mental health resources, and civic engagement resulting in reduced productivity and limited economic mobility.[96]

[91] Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (2023), US Federal Poverty Guidelines Used to Determine Financial Eligibility for Certain Programs. Accessed at: https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines.
[92] State of Washington (n.d.), Washington Connection (Your Link to Services). Accessed at: https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/.
[93] Washington State department of Social and Health Services (2019), Income – Effect of Income and Deductions on Eligibility and Benefit Level. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/income-table-contents/income-effect-income-and-deductions-eligibility-and-benefit-level.
[94] Office of Financial Management (2020), Washington Percent of Population in Poverty. Accessed at: https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/statewide-data/washington-trends/social-economic-conditions/population-poverty.
[95] US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), Employment Barriers within Low- and Moderate-income Communities. Accessed at: https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2020/beyond-bls/employment-barriers-within-low-and-moderate-income-communities.htm.
[96] US Department of Health and Human Services (2021), Social Determinants of Health: Poverty. Accessed at: https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/poverty

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), an estimated 10% of Washington state residents were living below the poverty line in 2020. However, demographics of low-income individuals vary across different groups. Children under 18 are particularly vulnerable, with a child poverty rate of about 13% in Washington state.[97] Additionally, the Hispanic and Latino population are severely economically disadvantaged relative to the rest of the state's population, with a poverty rate of 20% compared to 13% for Black individuals, 7% for white individuals, and 7% for Asian individuals.[98]

Access to high-speed, reliable internet may assist low-income individuals and households connecting to community resources, job opportunities, educational opportunities, and financial assistance programs. Some current digital assets that are uniquely meant to serve low-income individuals in Washington state are as follows:

Table 9: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Low-Income Households

Asset	Description
Affordable Connectivity Program	The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford broadband services. The benefit provides a discount of up to $30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to $75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to $100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than $10 and less than $50 toward the purchase price.
Answers Integrated Digital Empowerment (AIDE)	AIDE assists individuals who have a household income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level with applying for the Affordable Connectivity Program, navigating online resources and services, participating in free digital skills training reach month, and receiving additional financial assistance from Answers Counseling to help purchase a digital deice or pay for the discounted internet bill.
Blue Mountain Action Council	Blue Mountain Action Council is a local nonprofit service neighbors in Southeast Washington who are experiencing poverty. They provide free one-on-one tutoring to low-income adults, including basic literacy, computer skills, English language learning, and more.
InterConnection	InterConnection is a program that enables digital equity by providing technology and connectivity to underserved communities through sustainable refurbishment and re-use of digital devices, as well as low-cost hotspot internet.
The Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program	The Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program serves patients in 39 counties across Washington remotely. It provides free digital navigation; free digital literacy skills training; affordable internet access assistance and connected device acquisition assistance for residents or households at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

[97] United States Census Bureau (n.d.), Washington. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/profile/Washington?g=040XX00US53.
[98] United States Census Bureau (n.d.), Washington. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/profile/Washington?g=040XX00US53.

3.1.1.4 Individuals with language barriers

People with language barriers refer to individuals who face challenges in communicating effectively due to limited proficiency in the dominant language spoken in a particular country or region,[99] in this case, the term refers to those who are limited in their proficiency of the English language in Washington state.[100] These individuals may have difficulty understanding, speaking, reading, writing, or navigating the majority language, creating significant barriers to their integration, access to resources, and their participation in society.

The demographics of people with language barriers in Washington state include various factors such as immigration patterns, refugee settlements, and the diversity of ethnic and linguistic communities. Washington has historically been a destination for immigrants and refugees, leading to a diverse population with a wide range of languages spoken.[101] Advocacy for language access has been an active movement within the state, evident by recent legislative efforts, include increased access for students and families facing language barriers of interpretation and support services.[102] Efforts by the Washington State Coalition for Language Access to provide guidance and tools to departments, agencies, residents, and business as it pertains to accessible communications to individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and barriers to communication so that all services, programs, and activities are meaningfully accessible to all constituents.[103]

U.S. Census Bureau data indicate that a sizable percentage of Washington residents have limited proficiency in English and speak another language at home. Among the more than 1.13 million Washington residents in 2021 born outside the U.S., 42% spoke "English less than very well," compared to just 2% among U.S.-born residents.[104] Even among the nearly 560,000 Washington, residents who were naturalized American citizens — and can vote in elections — 35% said they had limited English proficiency, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.[105] Common non-English languages spoken in the state include Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, Korean, Tagalog, and many others.[106]

People with language barriers may face additional challenges in digital inclusion due to limited English proficiency and linguistic resources. Online resources and information may not be readily available in languages other than English; people with limited English proficiency may face challenges navigating and using digital platforms, applications, and online services; and online customer support, helplines, or instructional materials may not be available in languages other than English. Current digital assets that are serving people with language barriers in Washington state are as follows:

[99] Limited English Proficiency. Accessed at: https://www.lep.gov/.
[100] Washington State Coalition for Language Access (n.d.), Resources. Accessed at: https://www.wascla.org/resources.
[101] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (2023), Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/office-refugee-and-immigrant-assistance.
[102] Washington State Legislature (2022), Chapter 107, Laws of 2022. Accessed at https://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1153-S2.SL.pdf.
[103] Washington State Coalition for Language Access, Services. Accessed at: https://www.wascla.org/services.
[104] Migration Policy Institute (2021), State Immigration Data Profiles. Accessed at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/WA/US.
[105] Migration Policy Institute (2021), State Immigration Data Profiles. Accessed at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/WA/US.
[106] Migration Policy Institute (2021), State Immigration Data Profiles. Accessed at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/WA/US.

Table 10: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for People with Language Barriers

Asset	Description
Organizacion Centro Americano	Organizacion Centro Americano offers free computer workshops every Friday and Saturday afternoon for Spanish-speaking individuals, by partnering with Amistad School and Casa Latina to host the events. Other services include homeless employment programs, wage theft assistance, English and Spanish-language classes, as well as job skills workshops with a focus on digital skills.
RISE, Red de Inclusion Solidaridad y Empoderamiento	The Grays Harbor RISE Coalition brings together agencies serving the Spanish speaking and Latino community members of Grays Harbor County. As a network, they are grounded by the values of inclusion, solidarity, and empowerment; and offer free resources on how to access internet subsidy programs in the area.
Somali Family Safety Taskforce, Digital Literacy Program	The Somali Family Safety Task Force, in partnership with Seattle Public Libraries, provides a 10-week intro to Digital Literacy course at their New Holly Campus. Their Digital Literacy program is designed to provide low-income East African mothers living in the greater Seattle area with the opportunity to develop basic computer skills in a culturally inclusive and welcoming environment.
The Asian Counseling and Referral Service's Ready to Work	The Asian Counseling and Referral Service's Ready to Work is a comprehensive program serving people with very limited English overcome language barriers, gain digital literacy skills, find meaningful employment, and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.5 Individuals with disabilities

The federal government defines disability under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities.[107] According to the ADA, an individual with a disability is, "someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment."[108] Washington state defines disability in a similar manner, as the Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD) also considers individuals with any sensory, mental, or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities as having a disability.[109]

The Washington State Department of Health partners with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention to conduct a yearly survey that measures changes in the health of people in Washington state, called the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS).[110] According to the 2021 BRFSS, roughly 1,500,000 adults in Washington have a disability.[111] This is equal to

[107] US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, As Amended. Accessed at: https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/ada/.
[108] US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, As Amended. Accessed at: https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/ada/.
[109] Washington State Human Rights Commission, Employment: Washington State Law Against Discrimination. Accessed at: https://www.hum.wa.gov/employment#:~:text=RCW%20Chapter%2049.60%20is%20a,and%20state%20employee%20whistleblower%20complaints.
[110] Washington State Department of Health, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Accessed at: https://doh.wa.gov/data-statistical-reports/data-systems/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system-brfss.
[111] Washington State Department of Health, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Accessed at: https://doh.wa.gov/data-statistical-reports/data-systems/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system-brfss.

25%, or 1 in 4 adults, in Washington.[112] The percentage of adults in Washington with select functional disability types ranges, with 10% of adults experiencing mobility disabilities, 12% experiencing cognition disabilities, 7% experiencing independent living disabilities, 6% experiencing hearing disabilities, 4% experiencing vision disabilities, and 3% experiencing self-care disabilities.[113] Adults with disabilities in Washington experience health disparities and are 47% more likely to have depression, 37% more likely to be obese, 17% more likely to smoke, 13% more likely to have diabetes, and 9% more likely to have heart disease.[114]

People with disabilities may have unique challenges in accessing digital resources and participating fully in the digital society. Some common challenges include inaccessible websites, lack of assistive technology, limited digital skills, and affordability of internet services and devices. These challenges can then create barriers to education, employment, healthcare information, and social connections. Some current digital assets that are uniquely meant to serve people with disabilities in Washington state are as follows:

Table 11: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Persons with Disabilities

Asset	Description
Deaf-Blind Services Center	The Deaf-Blind Service Center is committed to assisting deaf-blind people in reaching and maintaining their highest possible quality of life and degree of personal autonomy. The center provides several resources to assist deaf-blind individuals with digital navigation, including a Communication Facilitator Program that helps with using screen devices, webcam devices, and other forms of technology.
Special Technology Access Resource (STAR) Center	The STAR Center at SHA's Center Park property provides residents with disabilities access to specialized training and technology. Classes offered to residents include the basics of using computers, printers, scanners, and the internet as well as employment skills training, adult basic education, and ESL. The lab is free and open to the public.
Washington State Assistive Technology Act Program	The Washington State Assistive Technology Act program offers information, training, and access to assistive technology devices and services that can help individuals with disabilities access the internet and digital resources.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.6 Racial and ethnic minorities

Racial and ethnic minorities refer to groups of people who are categorized based on their race or ethnicity and are considered to be a minority compared to the dominant racial or ethnic group in a particular region or country. The definitions of racial and ethnic minorities can vary depending on the context and jurisdiction. However, in the United States, federal definitions of racial and ethnic minorities, outlined in the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, are defined to include African Americans or Black Americans, Hispanic or Latinos, Asian American, Native Americans

[112] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), Disability Impacts: Washington. Accessed at: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/washington.html.
[113] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), Disability Impacts: Washington. Accessed at: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/washington.html.
[114] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), Disability Impacts: Washington. Accessed at: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/washington.html.

or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.[115] Washington state Office of Management and Budget defines ethnicity as either "Hispanic or Latino" or "Not Hispanic or Latino." The U.S. Office of Management and Budget defines "Hispanic or Latino" as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.[116] People who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race.

In Washington state, the definitions of racial and ethnic minorities align with the federal definitions set by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. The Washington State Data Book, produced by Washington state's Office of Financial Management, provides detailed demographic information about the state's population.[117] According to the recent population estimates of 2020, the racial and ethnic composition of Washington state was as follows:[118]

Table 12: Racial and ethnic composition of Washington by percentage

White alone:	61.6%	American Indian and Alaska Native alone:	1.1%
Hispanic alone:	18.7%	Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone:	0.2%
Black alone:	12.4%	Some Other Race alone	8.4%
Asian alone:	6%	Two or More Races:	10.2%

It is important to note that these numbers are approximate and can change over time. Washington state has a diverse population, with significant representation from various racial and ethnic groups. The experiences of these groups in the state can vary largely as well, but they do often face challenges related to systemic racism and discrimination. While progress has been made in promoting equality and social justice, racism remains an ongoing issue that many minority communities continue to confront. Structural barriers also exist for racial and ethnic minorities as they navigate accessing education, employment, housing, and healthcare services, and as they navigate the criminal justice system. In a response to these disparities in accessing vital resources for social and economic mobility, the state government has implemented policies and initiatives aimed at promoting equity and reducing racial disparities including criminal justice reform, improving police accountability, promoting fair housing policies, and expanding healthcare access.

Digital inclusion challenges are particularly significant for racial and ethnic minorities, as they often face disparities in accessing internet services and technology. The digital divide can further exacerbate existing inequalities and limit opportunities for racial and ethnic minority groups. In Washington state, several programs and resources are available to help address these challenges. Some current digital assets that are designed to serve racial and ethnic minorities in Washington state are as follows:

[115] Office of Management and Budget (1997), Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. Accessed at: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-1997-10-30/pdf/97-28653.pdf.
[116] Federal Register (2023), Initial Proposals for Updating OMB's Race and Ethnicity Statistical Standards. Accessed at: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/01/27/2023-01635/initial-proposals-for-updating-ombs-race-and-ethnicity-statistical-standards.
[117] State of Washington Office of Financial Management (2019), Data Book. Accessed at: https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/dataresearch/databook/pdf/databook.pdf.
[118] State of Washington Office of Financial Management (2019), Data Book. Accessed at: https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/dataresearch/databook/pdf/databook.pdf.

Table 13: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Racial and Ethnic Minorities

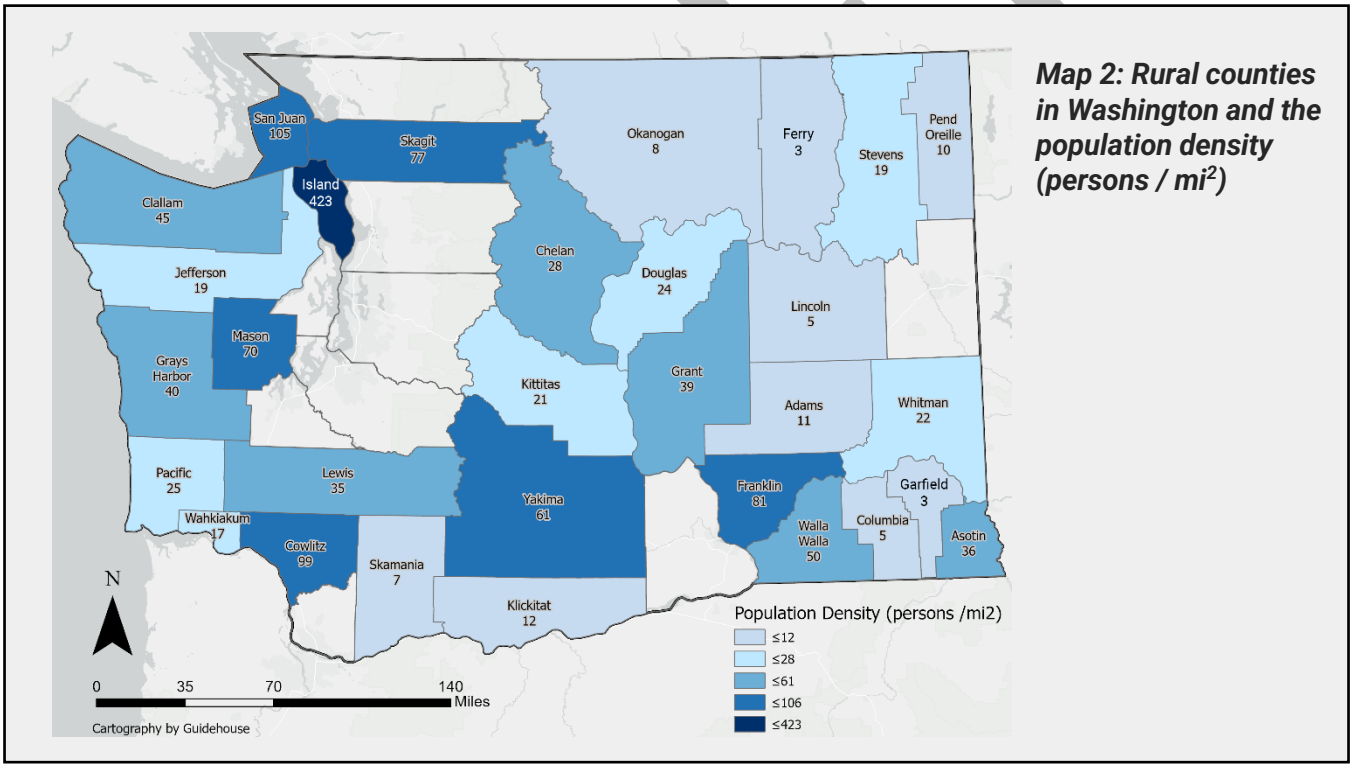
Asset	Description
HelpingLink	HelpingLink is a non-profit dedicated to empowering Vietnamese Americans, social adjustment, family stability, and self-sufficiency. The organization offers iPad/iPhone classes for adults and seniors within the Vietnamese community to learn translation, navigation, and communication skills.
Horn of Africa	Horn of Africa is a social services organization based in the Seattle and King County area dedicated to socially integrating, politically engaging, and achieving economic self-sufficiency for East African immigrants and refugees. They have created a digital equity plan and have staff dedicated to providing digital equity services.
Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center (KIAC)	KIAC works for the well-being and empowerment of immigrants through education, advocacy, and social justice. They offer language assistance, public computer workspaces, assistance with ACP enrollment, financial literacy workshops, meeting space available for classes/training, public Wi-Fi, and have conducted employment workshops with Goodwill.
Korean Women's Association of Pierce County	The Korean Women's Association is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, providing multi-cultural, multi-lingual human services, regardless of race or ethnic background, to diverse communities through education, socialization, advocacy, and support. They can assist with creating email accounts, learning how to search for jobs online, and accessing Lifeline or ACP discounts.
The Carl Maxey Center	The Carl Maxey Center is a Black-led and Black-centered non-profit that acts as a neighborhood culture center, and which provides program and services focused on the needs of Spokane's Black community. Through their Student Tech Fund, the center has partnered with Comcast to provide technology and supplies for free or at a subsidized cost to student who struggled with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to prevent students of color from falling further before.
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle	The Urban League Metropolitan Seattle, which works to empower African Americans and other diverse underserved communities to thrive by securing educational and economic opportunities. offers an InfoTech Program designed to create a more digitally engaged community by offering digital navigation services, digital skills trainings, workshops, certification programs, and assistance with signing up for the Affordable Connectivity Program.
Villa Comunitaria	Villa Comunitaria provides the program Aula Digital en Accion (Digital Classroom in Action), which is a community-driven solution to the challenges underrepresented and immigrant Latinx communities face when using technology to access jobs, apply for citizenship, engage with public schools, and access childcare and academic programs. It is a 12-week technology training program to help residents connect with online based application processes and resources.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.7 Rural inhabitants

The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural areas as a region that are not urbanized, consisting of open countryside, towns with fewer than 2,500 residents, and places with a population between 2,500 and 50,000 that are not part of an urbanized area.[119] Washington state expands this definition, by classifying areas as rural based on population density and proximity to urban centers. Washington state's Office of Financial Management uses the Urban Growth Areas and rural boundaries established by counties and cities to determine urban and rural areas within the state. In 1999, RCW 82.14.370 defined a "rural county" as, "a county with a population density less than 100 persons per square mile."[120] Subsequent legislation expanded the definition to include, "a county smaller than two hundred twenty-five square miles."[121]

According to this definition, 30 of 39 counties are considered rural with a population density less than 100 persons per square mile or counties smaller than 225 square miles as of April 1, 2013:[122]



Map 2: Rural counties in Washington and the population density (persons / mi^2)

[119] US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (2019), What is Rural? Accessed at: https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural/#:~:text=This%20delineation%20of%20built%2Dup,with%20fewer%20than%202%2C500%20people.

[120] Office of Financial management (2023), Population density and land area criteria used for rural area assistance and other programs. Accessed at: https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates/population-density/population-density-and-land-area-criteria-used-rural-area-assistance-and-other-programs.

[121] Office of Financial Management (2023)

[122] Office of Financial Management (2023)

According to the Washington state Hospital Association, rural communities account for about 19% of Washington state's population.[123] Rural communities in Washington state, face various challenges. Among these challenges are, limited access to health care services, educational institutions, transportation and infrastructure and job opportunities. Additionally, these counties have fewer economic opportunities compared to urban areas, leading to lower income levels, higher poverty rates, and limited economic diversifications; longer distances to travel to access essential services like healthcare facilities, grocery stores, and other amenities; and inadequate infrastructure including road, utilities, and broadband internet access. Digital inclusion, particularly access to high-speed internet, is a significant challenge in many rural communities. Some current digital assets that are uniquely meant to serve rural inhabitants in Washington state are as follows:

Table 14: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Rural Inhabitants

Asset	Description
Rural Resources Community Action	Rural Resources Community Action helps residents in Northeastern Washington access resources for education, health, employment and training, housing, and transportation. They offer free public Wi-Fi available 24 hours, a community digital navigator, two computers for the community to utilize, and have a program to assist with cybersecurity needs.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.8 Veterans

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs defines a veteran as, "a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable."[124] According to the Washington state Department of Veteran Affairs (WDVA), the state of Washington is home to about 530,000 veterans, 62,000 active duty, 18,000 guard and reserve, and 2,000,000 family members.[125] Washington state offers free services to veterans through the WDVA such as financial assistance, transitional assistance, and counseling.[126] The state itself also offers special benefits such as state employment preferences, education, and tuition assistance.[127]

Veterans are a priority population that is unserved and underserved. Whether it be access to telehealth and virtual counseling services, easy communication with family or access to educational resources, veterans can benefit greatly from increased digital connectivity. According to a 2018 Federal Communications Commission Report on promoting broadband internet access to veterans, "broadband connectivity is crucial to meeting the needs of and providing benefits to veterans, particularly low-income veterans and those residing in rural

[123] Washington State Hospital Association (2017), Health inequities in rural communities. Accessed at: https://www.wsha.org/articles/health-inequities-rural-communities/.
[124] US Department of Veterans Affairs (2019), Determining Veteran Status. Accessed at: https://www.va.gov/OSDBU/docs/Determining-Veteran-Status.pdf.
[125] Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, About WDVA. Accessed at: https://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva.
[126] Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, About WDVA. Accessed at: https://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva.
[127] Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, About WDVA. Accessed at: https://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva.

areas."[128] The report also recognizes the amplified advantage digital connectivity has on veterans with disabilities.[129]

Veterans without internet access were more likely to be older, unmarried, have completed less education, and earn a lower annual income than those veterans reporting current internet access, according to an internet access survey by the National Library of Medicine.[130] In addition, veterans without internet access were less likely to report being in good health and less likely to be confident in filling out medical forms without assistance.[131] In order to solve for these issues, digital connectivity efforts for veterans must be a priority for Washington. Some current digital assets that are uniquely meant to serve veterans in Washington state are as follows:

Table 15: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Veterans

Asset	Description
Kittitas County Veterans Coalition	The Kittitas County Veterans Coalition offers classes to support digital literacy skills, public computer workspaces, mobile hotspots, or device lending programs, and assists with Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment and the Digital Navigator Program.
Veterans Outreach Center: VFW Post-1443	The Veterans Outreach Center in Asotin County collaborates with the County Library to get digital navigator services to veterans at the center, at no-cost.
Washington state Department of Veterans Affairs Digital Navigators Program	The WSDVA Digital Navigator Program provides veterans or their families with the tools (a kit containing talk, text, and data through T-Mobile, a laptop, and a smartphone with a hotspot) and digital literacy training allowing them to connect to earned benefits such as disability compensation or pension, healthcare, and other services.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

ASSETS IDENTIFIED SERVING STATE UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS COVERED UNDER HB1723

3.1.1.9 Youth in foster care

Youth in foster care refers to individuals who are minors and have been placed under the care and supervision of the state or a foster care agency due to abuse, neglect, or other reasons that prevent them from living with their biological parents or guardians. In Washington state, the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) provides the legal framework for foster care.[132] According to RWC 74.13.020, a child in foster care is defined as an individual under the age of 18 who has been

[128] US Federal Communications Commission (2018), Report on Promoting Broadband Internet Access Services for Veterans. Accessed at: https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-357270A1.pdf.
[129] Ibid.
[130] National Library of Medicine (2013), Veteran Internet Use and Engagement with Health Information Online. Accessed at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23707823/.
[131] National Library of Medicine (2013), Veteran Internet Use and Engagement with Health Information Online. Accessed at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23707823/.
[132] Washington State Legislature (2022), Adoption support program administration—Rules and Regulations—Disbursements from general fund, criteria—Limits. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=74.13A.020.

placed under the care and supervision of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) or a licensed child-placing agency.[133]

As reported by a program manager for the DCYF during an informant interview, there were approximately 10,060 children in foster care in Washington state. These children are distributed across various regions in Washington, yet the largest number of children in foster care were from the two largely urban counties of King and Pierce County, followed by Snohomish County. Another DCYF program manager who was interviewed supported this observation, stating that children in foster care are mostly concentrated in urban areas because there is more surveillance and "eyes" on the treatment of youth within densely populated communities.

Youth in foster care experience a plethora of unique challenges that can impact their well-being and their future prospects. Some of the main challenges observed in Washington state include frequent placement changes, educational disruptions, emotional and behavioral issues, and aging out of foster care and no longer having access to direct support for housing, employment, and accessing supportive services. Digital inclusion is another significant concern for youth in foster care, since access to technology and the internet is crucial in today's world for normalcy, education, social connection, and access to resources. Some current digital assets that are uniquely meant to serve youth in foster care in Washington state are as follows:

Table 16: Examples of digital inclusion assets for youth in foster care

Asset	Description
Independent Living (IL) Program, DCYF	The IL program is a voluntary program for youth ages 15 through 22 who are or were in foster care with DCYF or a tribal court. The program is open to all youth who meet specific eligibility requirements. Youth can be anywhere on the spectrum of transitioning to adulthood. DCYF contracts with local community-based agencies and federally recognized tribes throughout the state to provide independent living skills, including digital skills, educational support, career exploration, and daily living skills.
Treehouse Educational Advocacy Program	Treehouse Educational Advocates support students in foster care by providing timely, appropriate educational supports and interventions tailored to each individual's academic and developmental needs. By partnering with a team of existing supports in a youth's life — caregivers, caseworkers, teachers, school counselors, and community providers — Treehouse Educational Advocates help resolve barriers and identify needed resources for the youth to make progress at school, including digital literacy skills and devices.
Youth Empowerment Program, DCYF	The Youth Empowerment Program specializes in ensuring that the children under the care of the DCYF have the tangible resources needed to participate in their educational, professional, or personal endeavors; including, access to technology such as a laptop to participate in online schooling or to for online enrollment into social services.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

[133] Washington State Legislature (2022), Adoption support program administration—Rules and Regulations—Disbursements from general fund, criteria—Limits. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=74.13A.020.

3.1.1.10 Individuals experiencing housing instability

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a person is considered homeless if they reside in a place not meant for human habitation, emergency shelters, or transitional housing.[134] Those who are exiting an institution and have no other residence are also considered homeless. Washington state law defines a "homeless person" as, "an individual living outside or in a building not meant for human habitation or which they have no legal right to occupy, in an emergency shelter, or in a temporary housing program which may include a transitional and supportive housing program if habitation time limits exist."[135]

The precise number of people experiencing homelessness in Washington can fluctuate due to various factors, making it challenging to provide an exact figure. However, according to the 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report published by HUD, there is approximately 25,200 people experiencing homelessness in the state of Washington.[136] The number of Washingtonians who are unsheltered, in vehicles or in temporary shelter grew by 10% from 2020 to 2022, increasing by about 2,300 people.[137] Slightly more than 70% of that growth came from Seattle and King County.[138] Local experts, though, say those numbers should be treated with some skepticism and should be treated as an undercount, since much of its data comes from the annual Point-In-Time count, when, on a single night in January, researchers count by hand the number of people they see living unsheltered.[139]

People experiencing homelessness also face grave challenges such as struggling to meet their basic needs including access to food, clothing, hygiene facilities, and transportation. Additionally, these individuals often times face mental health and substance abuse issues and difficulties with accessing health care or mental health services. Barriers to digital inclusion are also prolific within the population of people experiencing homelessness, including limited to no access to technology, lack of internet connectivity, and digital literacy challenges. Public Wi-Fi, computer labs, and libraries have been emphasized as crucial assets for the homeless population to access the digital world; including to check their emails, look for housing and employment, and for general entertainment activities. Some current digital assets that are uniquely meant to serve people experiencing homelessness in Washington state are as follows:

[134] National Alliance to End Homelessness (2012), Changes in the HUD Definition of "Homeless." Accessed at: https://endhomelessness.org/resource/changes-in-the-hud-definition-of-homeless/.
[135] Washington State Legislature (2022), RCW 43.185C.010. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.010#:~:text=(12)%20%22Homeless%20person%22,if%20habitation%20time%20limits%20exist.
[136] The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (2022), The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Accessed at: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf.
[137] The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (2022), The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Accessed at: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf.
[138] The Seattle Times (2023), WA's homeless population is increasing, new HUD report shows. Accessed at: https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/was-homeless-population-is-increasing-new-hud-report-shows/.
[139] The Seattle Times (2023), WA's homeless population is increasing, new HUD report shows. Accessed at: https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/was-homeless-population-is-increasing-new-hud-report-shows/.

Table 17: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for People Experiencing Homelessness

Asset	Description
Mercy Housing Northwest	Mercy Housing Northwest owns and operates 54 properties throughout Washington and Idaho, providing over 5,000 families and seniors a place to call home at below-market rent. They additionally have staff to provide digital navigation to residents at seven multifamily housing properties in Pierce County, and to assist with enrolling in the ACP. Computer labs are accessible to residents through their properties as well.
Pierce County Resources, Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness	The Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness has worked rigorously to consolidate resources for those experiencing homelessness and/or poverty in Pierce County, Washington to a single site. This project, Pierce County Resources, is intended to be an easy-to-use guide for those experiencing homelessness. It includes a database where individuals can locate employment and job training centers, food banks, mental health care, medical care, clothing resources, drug and alcohol treatment centers, dental care, sexual assault and domestic violence services, pregnancy services, housing supportive services, utility assistance, and more.
Valeo Vocation	Valeo Vocation combats poverty and homelessness in Pierce County by offering quick access to income, combined with wrap-around support, to help participants create a path towards permanent employment and housing. The organization provides a public computer lab for job seekers to apply for programs, services, and employment; as well as free public Wi-Fi, digital navigation, and low-cost devices.

A full cataloging of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.2 Existing Digital Equity Plans

In collaboration with Washington State University-Extension and local government, 39 local counties and 11 tribes developed Community Action Plans to showcase the unique needs of their communities and solutions to achieve digital equity.[140] These plans highlight the need for additional infrastructure, devices, training, and partnerships to equip residents with the skills they need to participate in the online society. While many counties and tribes detailed services needed to combat those barriers, a consistent theme with the Community Action Plans was the desire for additional funding to expand and extend existing services provided by libraries and community organizations including digital equity resources. Many counties and tribes also mentioned systemic barriers such as lack of housing or transportation as inhibiting digital access.

While not every county or tribe developed solution for addressing barriers for covered populations at the local level, many plans detailed the desire to learn and share best practices with neighboring counties with the goal of supporting vulnerable communities. **Table 18** provides a snapshot of Digital Equity plans, including barriers identified by the counties and tribes within Washington state.

Table 18: County and Tribe Digital Equity Plan Summaries

Activity Name	Barrier to Digital Equity
Adams County	Identified rural geography of the county and language as major barriers
Asotin County	Large percentage of population of the country are older adults and may have a fear or lack of understanding of technology, also identified affordability as a barrier
Benton County	Identified language barriers, legal status cost, digital skills, and access to other services such as transportation, as barriers
Chelan County	Identified lack of planning and coordination, resources, digital literacy, and internet speeds
Clallam County	Individuals living in rural areas need to travel long distances to access digital equity services, which results in underutilization and awareness
Clark County	Identified issues such as lack of housing, training programs, high costs, and fear as barriers for the community
Clark County	Identified a range of issues including lack of housing, training programs, affordability concerns, and general fear of technology
Columbia County	Identified funding sources, knowledge of devices, and lack of support services like digital navigators and the library system as barriers
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Nation/ Ferry County	Identified affordability and availability as major barriers to connection within the county
Cowlitz County	Identified a lack of community wide digital equity resources including nonprofit and organization support, limited equipment, and understaffed libraries.

[140] In addition to the 11 tribes that submitted independent Community Action Plans, four tribes partnered with counties in developing a Community Action Plan.

Activity Name	Barrier to Digital Equity
Cowlitz Indian Tribe	Identified elder and low-income, and tribal members in rural or remote locations as facing the greatest need.
Douglas County	Identified lack of planning and coordination, resources, digital literacy, and internet speeds
Franklin County	Identified costs, need for digital skills and staff support, and funding for programming, understanding that some organizations serve covered populations, but may not formally provide digital equity support
Garfield County	Individuals living in rural areas need to travel long distances to access digital equity services; community resources such as libraries are understaffed
Grant County	Identified lack of planning and coordination, resources, digital literacy, and internet speeds
Grays Harbor County	Identified the need for sustainable funding for programs, spaces for services, and community awareness and partnerships to connect member with digital equity services
Hoh Tribe	Identified lack of broadband as the major barrier for digital equity support services
Island County	Identified the topography of the county and lack of digital literacy as major barriers
Jefferson County	Lack of transportation to digital equity services. Lack of material in other language other than English, understaffing at community anchor sites, lack of devices
King County	Identified disparities in access and affordability, need for digital skills, and building capacity for community organizations and cross-sector partnership and collaboration
Kitsap County	Identified costs of services, lack of awareness of programs like ACP, costs of repairing or replacing devices, and mistrust of government programs and ISP
Kittitas County	Identified community awareness, outreach, and perceived value of learning new technology and its economic utility and potential opportunities
Klickitat County	Limited capacity and resource constraints for local organizations; dispersed population creating challenges for getting to services, limited staffing to support culturally specific program development in rural areas
Lewis County	Identified economic barriers for the county population including limited access to devices, lack of affordability, other system barriers such as transportation to access services at libraries or other community anchor organizations
Makah Tribe	Lack of infrastructure, cost of installation, lack of digital equity services available on the reservation
Mason County	Identified lack of affordable services and devices; also mentioned that some residents prefer to live in rural areas without internet access
Nooksack Indian Tribe	Highlighted that service availability is the largest barrier to access for the community, with all tribal households as underserved
Okanogan County	Identified lack of digital literacy, affordability of devices, lack of programming to support communities, and historic exclusive of tribal community

Activity Name	Barrier to Digital Equity
Pacific County	Identified cost of installation in low population density areas, costs of equipment and service, and lack of digital literacy
Pend Oreille County	Identified access and affordability as the biggest barriers
Pierce County	Identified lack of funding for infrastructure, technical support, wrap around services, devices, and consistent partnerships with ISP
Samish Indian Nation	Support the community in obtaining personal devices and maintain locations for communities to access public networks but identified sustainability as a major barrier, including maintaining the devices and reliability of the internet service at the public network locations
San Juan County	Identified organizations providing digital equity services, but noted services are concentrated on three islands and the unique travel challenges residents face.
Skagit County	Identified affordability and availability as major challenges; lack of awareness in community about support programs such as ACP
Skamania County	Limited capacity and resource constraints for local organizations; dispersed population creating challenges for getting to services, limited staffing to support culturally specific program development in rural areas
Snohomish County	Identified lack of trust in technology and security, affordability, and accessibility
Spokane County	Identified need for more resourcing of community anchor organizations, need for devices, language access and support understanding cultural barriers, and additional literacy
Stevens County	Identified low population density, high costs of services, digital literacy, and limited communication to share information with community and stakeholders
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community	Lack of resources, lack of unified approach to sharing information with the community, inconsistent services
Thurston County & Nisqually Indian Tribe	Identified need for sourcing translation services as well as devices in order to maximize effectiveness of digital skills training
Wahkiakum County	Need for more resources and services within the county including support for community anchor organization, equipment, and facilities to meet community needs
Walla Walla	Identified barriers to Digital Equity for the community within the county, including lack of high-speed internet and reluctance to ask for assistance due to immigration status and/or share personal information via online system
Whatcom County	Identified underserved communities in rural areas, need for more devices, additional funding for outreach and communication, and community understanding the benefits of adoption
Whitman County	Identified lack of digital skills and affordability of devices and internet subscriptions
Yakima County	Identified community awareness, outreach, and perceived value of learning new technology and its economic utility and potential opportunities

3.1.3 Statewide Assets for Broadband Adoption

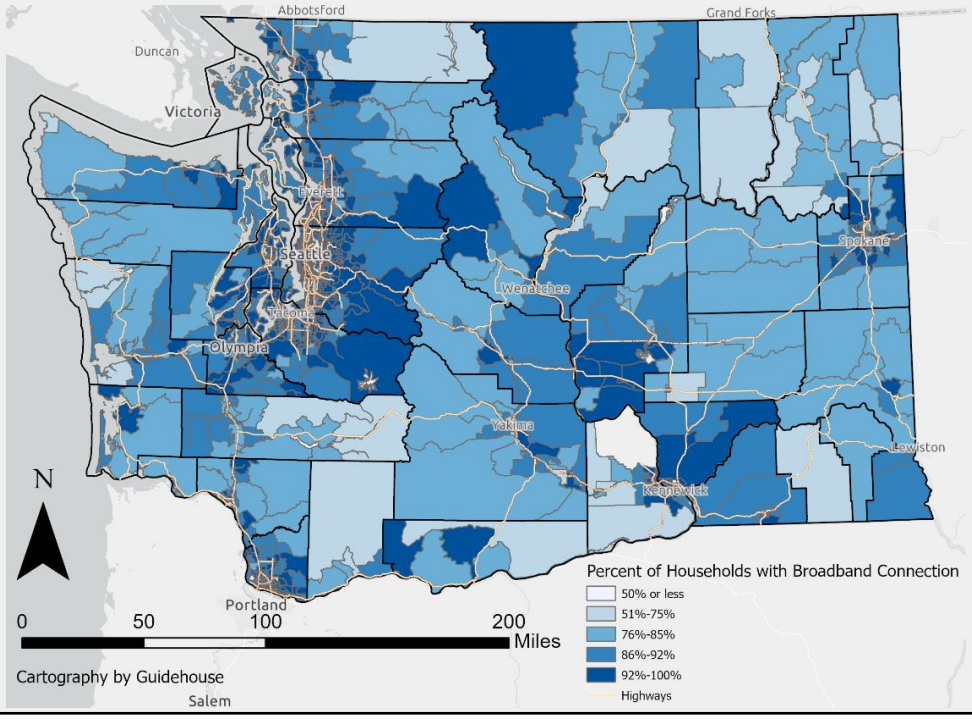
Facilitating the adoption of broadband services is an essential component of providing reliable, universal, high-speed internet for residents, communities, and businesses across the state. According to federal law, broadband adoption equates to "daily access to the internet":

(1) At speeds, quality, and capacity necessary to accomplish common tasks,

(2) With the digital skills necessary to fully participate online, and

(3) On a personal device and secure convenient network."[141]

Using ACS data, an average of 92% of households within the state have a broadband internet subscription and 96% have digital devices.[142] However, as **Map 3** displays, broadband subscription is not uniform throughout the state, as some areas have household broadband subscription rates well below this average. Moreover, household broadband subscription rates in counties such as Ferry, Columbia, and Pend Oreille counties are as low as 71%, 75%, and 78%, respectively. The inequitable distribution of broadband subscription rates across Washington state can be attributed in part to limited access to broadband services, but there are also many Washingtonians who do not adopt broadband services because they do not have the digital literacy skills to use the internet, do not see the need for internet access, or they do not have a device to access the internet. Fortunately, a wide array of collaborators in local governments, tribes, community anchor institutions, and nonprofits are continuing efforts to expand broadband and invest in digital equity programs.



Map 3: Percent of Households with a Cable, Fiber, or DSL Broadband Subscription by Census Tract[143]

Source: Analysis of ACS's broadband subscription data accessed on May 24, 2023.

[141] Digital Equity Act of 2021 (2021). Accessed at: 47 USC Ch. 16: BROADBAND ACCESS (house.gov)

[142] American Community Survey (2021), S2801: Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions [5 Year Estimates]. Accessed at: ACS Data: S2801 Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions [5 Year Estimates]

[143] Although satellite services are not a reliable source of broadband, in accordance with NTIA definition, it may be the only viable option for some households in Washington that are in extremely high-cost locations. Please note that as fixed wireless is considered broadband by the FCC, it is captured in the ACS broadband subscription data on this map.

Many Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Washington state are involved in promoting broadband adoption to counteract low subscription rates. ISPs promote access to broadband adoption through campaigns, low-cost plans, or digital inclusion initiatives. As providers of broadband across the state, ISPs are integral to the broadband expansion partner ecosystem. Collaborative partnerships exist among several ISPs and entities who provide internet connectivity and navigation services. In fact, multiple digital navigator programs across the state received discounted digital devices with connective service plans from AT&T, T-Mobile, and Comcast. The following partnership examples are only a sample, and not inclusive of all ISPs recent partnerships across Washington state.

One example of this is the WSBO-funded digital navigation services offered by Washington's Department of Veterans Affairs in collaboration with T-Mobile, which provides veterans with discounted wireless service, devices, and support with digital skilling.

Another example of a private ISP promoting adoption is Comcast, who has partnered with Goodwill of the Inland Northwest to expand its low-income internet and technology. Together, the organizations opened the Comcast Digital Training Classroom in Spokane for Goodwill's job training and placement program, which helps people increase their digital skills and workforce opportunities, giving participants the skills needed to facilitate broadband adoption. Comcast and Goodwill also announced the expansion of Comcast's Internet Essentials broadband adoption program, which allows internet to be more easily accessible to low-income households in Comcast's Washington service area and includes training resources and guidance for individuals on internet basics and how to stay safe online.[144]

Furthermore, AT&T and Digitunity selected InterConnection to provide refurbished computers and technical support to two thousand Seattle-based students through their 10-City Project.[145] This collaboration provides funding to eleven nonprofit refurbishing organizations from Digitunity's Alliance for Technology Refurbishing and Reuse Network to award devices directly to local K-12 students and their families, addressing one of the causes of low broadband subscription rates.

In addition to efforts by ISPs to improve subscription rates, many state and community organizations are addressing broadband adoption by focusing on improving digital literacy and augmenting digital skills. As **Table 19** shows below, programs range from those that promote digital inclusion or provide skills training, to those that offer subsidized or low-cost device distribution. It is worthwhile to note that the Washington State Legislature identified two additional underserved populations in the Digital Equity Act, namely individuals experiencing housing instability and youth in foster care.

[144] Comcast (October 7, 2019), Comcast, Goodwill Celebrate Internet Essentials Washington State Expansion. Accessed at: https://washington.comcast.com/2019/10/07/comcast-goodwill-celebrate-internet-essentials-wa-state-expansion/

[145] InterConnection (n.d.), InterConnection Partners with AT&T and Digitunity to Bridge Digital Divide Among Students. Accessed at: InterConnection Partners with AT&T and Digitunity to Bridge Digital Divide Among Students | Charitable Computer Recycling & Reuse

Table 19: Examples of Programs Supporting Broadband Adoption

Organization Names	Asset Description	Asset Type	Target Covered Populations[146]
The Asian Counseling and Referral Service's Ready to Work	A comprehensive program serving people with limited English overcome language barriers, gain digital literacy skills, find meaningful employment, and achieve economic self-sufficiency.[147]	Digital Literacy Program	Individuals with a language barrier; Individuals who are members of a racial/ethnic minority group
The Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program	A program that serves patients in 39 counties across Washington remotely. It provides free digital navigation; free digital literacy skills training; affordable internet access assistance and connected device acquisition assistance for residents or households at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.[148]	Digital Navigator Program	Individuals who live in low-income households
Computing for All	A program that seeks to break down cultural and systemic social barriers that prevent young adults of all races, genders, and abilities from exploring computer science as a potential career. These employer-mentored, project-based work programs support practicing the application of critical thinking and problem-solving to real-world work scenarios.[149]	Digital Skills Training Program	N/A
Goodwill Connect	A statewide collaboration of all the independent Goodwill locations in Washington to increase digital equity to individuals furthest from opportunity by offering free digital skills training, devices, and broadband connectivity.[150]	Digital Navigator Program	N/A
HelpingLink	A program that offers iPad lessons and training for adults and seniors, from beginner basics to advanced features of iPads. Enrollment in the class is free and provides students with everything they need to know about using an iPad for translation, navigation, and communication.[151]	Digital Literacy Program	Aging individuals

[146] "Target Covered Populations" describes the 13 population groups NTIA identified as underrepresented communities: low-income households; ageing individuals; incarcerated individuals; veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners or have low levels of literacy; individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. Additionally, we also included two population groups—children and youth in foster care and individuals experiencing housing instability—identified in Washington state law's definition of 'covered populations', when applicable.

[147] Asian Counseling and Referral Service (n.d.), Ready to Work. Accessed at: https://acrs.org/services/employment-and-training-services/ready-to-work/

[148] Community Health Network Washington (n.d.), Link to Care WA. Accessed at: https://www.linktocarewa.org

[149] Computing for All (n.d.), Launch Your Tech Career. Accessed at: https://www.computingforall.org/

[150] Goodwill Connect (n.d.). Accessed at: https://goodwillconnect.com/

[151] Helping Link (n.d.). Accessed at: https://www.helpinglink.org/about/

Organization Names	Asset Description	Asset Type	Target Covered Populations[146]
InterConnection	A program that enables digital equity by providing technology and connectivity to underserved communities through sustainable refurbishment and re-use of digital devices.[152]	Discounted Device Program	Underserved communities in general
Microsoft LEARN (formerly Microsoft Imagine Academy)	Microsoft's centralized training and professional development platform for K12, where educators and school leaders can explore free learning and skills resources and learn about programs, professional development offerings, and Microsoft technologies that advance teaching and learning practices.	Digital Skills Training Program	N/A
The Office of Superintendent of Public Instructure Digital Equity and Inclusion Grants	A grant program that allocates state funds, with the aim to support digital learning environments, grow and support 1:1 device program, provide access to training in inclusionary practices, and more.[153]	Digital Literacy Program	N/A
The Seattle Housing Authority Digital Navigation	A program that offers digital navigation services to Seattle Housing Authority residents. Digital navigation services include learning how to set up a computer, signing up for discounted internet services, navigating the internet, using contemporary meeting apps such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet, and using Microsoft Office to create documents with word processing and spreadsheet software.[154]	Digital Navigator Program	Individuals experiencing housing instability
The TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk (Equity in Education Coalition)	A program that provides free technical support to Washington residents to help them engage in a virtual environment. Helpdesk Technicians are standing by to provide technical guidance, digital navigation support, and connections to other community resources to support parents, students, elders, and all community members during this time. The team is available to provide guidance via chat, email, or phone in the languages listed below.[155]	Digital Navigator Program	N/A

[152] InterConnection (n.d.). Accessed at: https://interconnection.org/
[153] OSPI (2023), Digital Equity and Inclusion Grant. Accessed at: https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/grants-grant-management/digital-equity-and-inclusion-grant
[154] Seattle Housing Authority (n.d.), Technology Training. Accessed at: https://www.seattlehousing.org/supportive-services/education-and-job-training/technology-training
[155] TechConnect Washington (n.d.). Accessed at: https://techconnectwa.org/

Organization Names	Asset Description	Asset Type	Target Covered Populations[146]
Washington 4-H Tech Changemakers	A program that helps adults and other learners by supporting digital literacy, digital equity, tech adoption, and promoting tribal or rural broadband. 4-H Youth are helping adults find jobs, understand remote work, and how to access or adopt new technology.[156]	Digital Literacy Program	N/A
The Washington State Department of Veteran's Affairs Digital Navigator Program	The program provides eligible Veterans or their families with devices like a laptop and a smartphone with a mobile hotspot through a partnership with T-Mobile. The program includes digital literacy training as well to connect more veterans with their earned benefits like disability compensation, pension, healthcare, and other services.[157]	Digital Navigator Program	Veterans

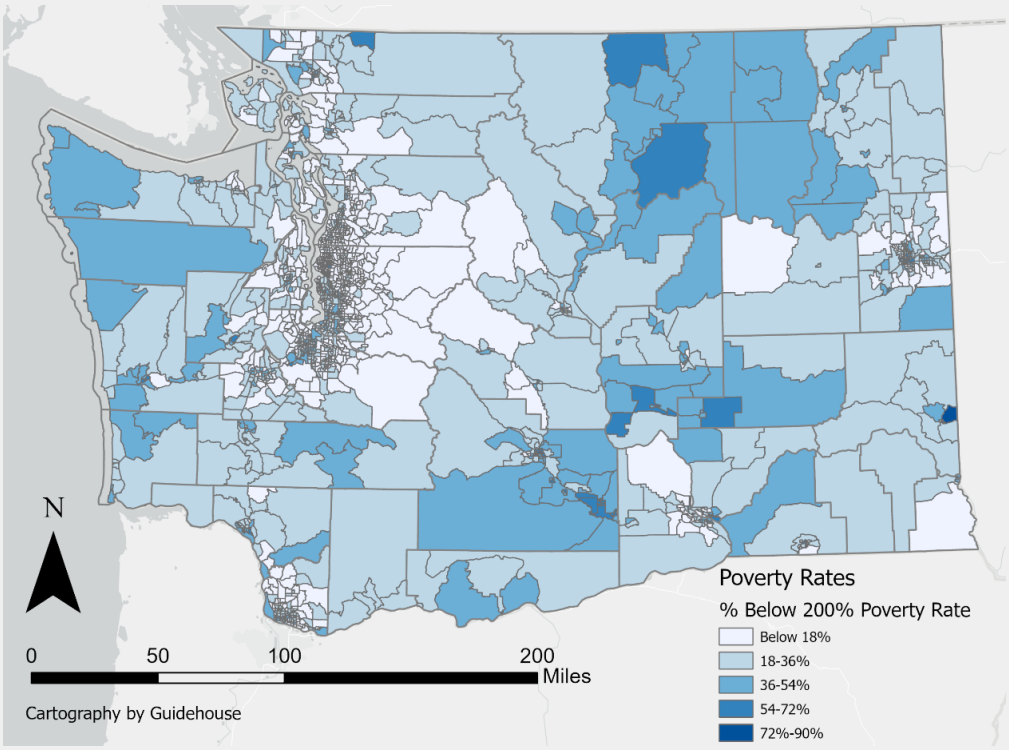
The volume of diverse actors in the broadband adoption space provides multiple avenues to reach Washingtonians without broadband subscriptions. Although the programs and opportunities related to broadband adoption listed here are not comprehensive, this section demonstrates the breadth of assets related to adoption within Washington state. Organizations working in the digital equity space have the potential to effectively improve subscription rates and reduce the number of unserved households within the state.

[156] Washington State University (n.d.), 4-H Youth Development Program – Ferry County. Accessed at: https://extension.wsu.edu/ferry/4-h-youth-families/

[157] Chris Cashman (2023) Washington veterans can get free tech, digital literacy training under new program. Accessed at: https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/washington-veterans-free-technology-digital-literacy-training/281-0523ffb3-7b02-4857-a835-dbcd5b8d829d

3.1.4 Statewide Assets for Broadband Affordability

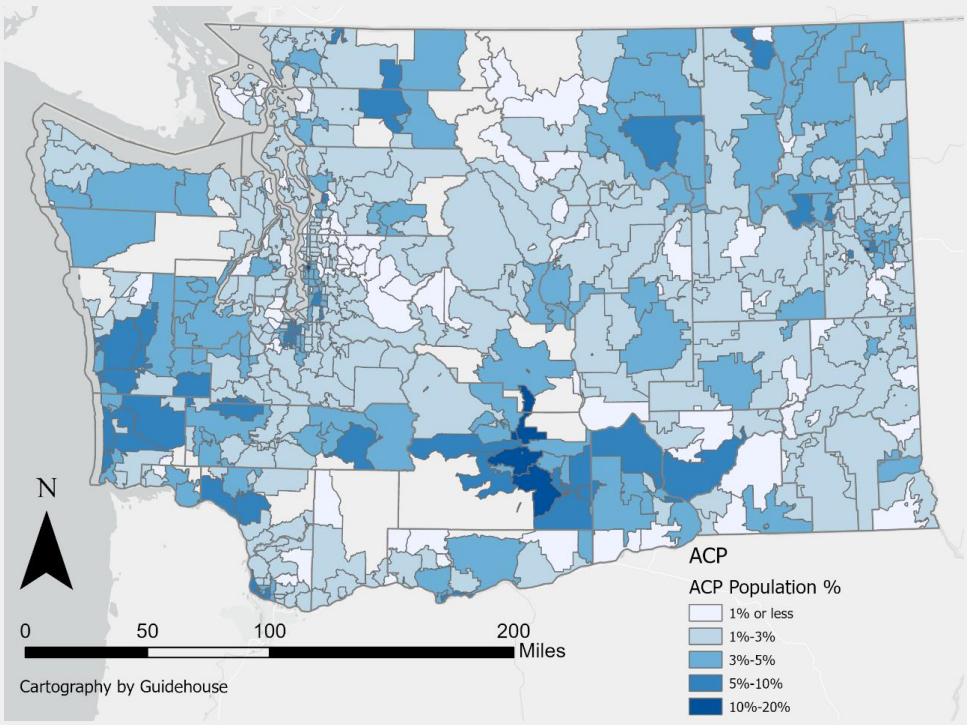
The WSBO recognizes that affordability is a significant barrier for many community members when it comes to broadband internet adoption, especially in areas where a high proportion of the population live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, as **Map 4** shows. In approaching this obstacle to universal adoption, it is important to look to the existing ecosystem of affordability programs and incentives that can reduce the cost burden for consumers throughout the state.



Map 4: Percent of Population Living at or Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines by Census Tract

Source: Analysis of 2021 ACS data.

To address concerns surrounding broadband affordability, the federal government requires BEAD funding recipients to ensure that consumers benefitting from subsequent broadband projects have access to affordable internet options, including the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP is an FCC program that provides different internet service discount options according to tiers of eligibility for individuals living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or participating in various assistance programs can apply to the ACP program. **Map 5** shows the percentage of the population enrolled in ACP for each zip code. As the administering entity, the WSBO is committed to ensuring that all subscribers within BEAD project areas can utilize the ACP to increase the affordability of broadband services.



Map 5: Percent of Population Enrolled in ACP by Zip Code

Source: Analysis of Universal Service Administrative Company and NoaNet ACP data.

Although the ACP is the primary program for subsidizing broadband subscriptions, it is not the sole subsidized or discounted broadband service and equipment program available to consumers throughout the state, as outlined in **Table 20** below.

Table 20: Examples of Broadband Affordability Programs Throughout the State

Organization Name	Asset Description	Asset Eligibility	Asset Type
The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)	An FCC program that helps families and households afford internet service. The program benefits include up to $30 per month discount on internet service; up to $75 per month discount for households on qualifying tribal lands; and a onetime discount of up to $100 for a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet through a participating provider.	Enrollment in the ACP is open to households that meet specific criteria, which can include having an income that is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or participating in assistance programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing, Supplemental Security Income, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or Lifeline.[158]	Subsidy Program
Connect All powered by InterConnection	A program that provides low-cost internet for $14.95 per month on the T-Mobile LTE Plus network through Mobile Citizen. There is a one-time cost fee of $99 to purchase an LTE modem hotspot, but the program includes unlimited LTE plus data with no overage charges. The program also offers refurbished laptops available for a low-cost with software (Windows, Microsoft Office, Microsoft Security Essentials) and a one-year warranty.	Residents can qualify if they are a DSHS recipient or have an annual income no greater than $54,000.[159]	Discount Program
The Internet Essentials Program from Comcast	The program provides download speeds up to 50 Mbps, free installation and in-home Wi-Fi, and other benefits. Eligible households are also able to purchase refurbished laptops for $149.99 + tax.	This program provides internet service at no cost if customers are qualified for and enrolled in the ACP.[160]	Discount Program

[158] Washington State Department of Commerce (n.d.), Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and Lifeline. Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/affordable-connectivity-program-acp-and-lifeline/

[159] InterConnection (n.d.), Connect All. Accessed at: https://connectall.org/

[160] Xfinity (n.d.), Internet Essentials. Accessed at: https://www.xfinity.com/learn/internet-service/internet-essentials

Organization Name	Asset Description	Asset Eligibility	Asset Type
Lifeline	A federal program that lowers the monthly cost of phone or internet service. Eligible consumers can get up to $9.25 off the cost of phone, internet, or bundled services. If you live on tribal lands, you can receive a discount of up to $35.25 per month, and up to a $100 reduction for first time connection charges.	Eligible residents can get Lifeline if their income is 135% or less than the federal poverty guidelines. The guideline is based on their household size and state. Residents may also qualify if they or someone in their household gets SNAP, Apple Health (Medicaid), or other federal assistance programs.[161]	Subsidy Program
The Simply Internet by Astound (by Wave)	A program in Seattle that is open to current or new Astound powered by Wave customers who live in an area where Astound is available. The service provides service levels of 50/5 Mbps for $9.95 per month + tax, free installation, and in-home Wi-Fi.	Eligibility includes those who quality for the Seattle Utilities Discount Program, those who qualify for low-income subsidized housing, or those who have a child who qualifies for the free or reduced school lunch program.[162]	Discount Program
Spectrum Internet Assist (Charter Communications)	Spectrum Internet Assist is an affordable, reliable Internet option for low-income households.	To qualify for Spectrum Internet Assist, a household member must be receiving one of these assistance programs: (1) National School Lunch Program, (2) Community Eligibility Provision of the NSLP, or (3) Supplemental Security Income (for applicants age 65+ only).	Discount Program

According to the Universal Service Administrative Co. ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, Washington has an estimated 1,125,000 eligible households, however, as of August 28, 2023, 307,000 are enrolled.[163] Yet, despite its benefits, many households eligible for ACP in Washington state do not take advantage of program – only about 26% of households eligible for ACP enrolled in the program.[164] To address this, the Washington State Department of Commerce has expanded its efforts to increase recognition of the ACP and subsequent enrollment, providing resources on its homepage to assist residents with the application process. Additionally, many city, county, and nonprofit organization websites link to the ACP to boost awareness and provide details on how residents can apply for the program.

[161] Universal Service Administrative Co. (n.d.), Lifeline Support. Accessed at: https://www.lifelinesupport.org/
[162] Wave (n.d.), Simply Internet. Accessed at: https://wavesimplyinternet.com/
[163] Universal Service Administrative Co. (July 2023), ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker. Accessed at: https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#enrollment-by-state
[164] Universal Service Administrative Co. (July 2023), ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker. Accessed at: https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#enrollment-by-state

Supplementing these state and local government outreach efforts, some private ISPs in Washington state are also implementing programs intended to increase ACP enrollment. For example, Comcast recently announced that residents can now visit Xfinity Retail Stores throughout Washington state to enroll in ACP to get internet service for free via Internet Essentials Plus, a service that includes 100 Mbps speeds, a cable modem, access to Wi-Fi hotspots, and unlimited data for $29.95 per month.[165] This program provides eligible households with the opportunity to have someone walk them through the application process step by step: a crucial service considering that our interviews with digital equity professionals within the state identified the multi-step application process as a barrier to program entry. Other nonprofit organizations, such as Goodwill and the Equity in Education Coalition, also regularly promote the ACP to eligible constituents and provide them with the information needed to apply to the program.

In addition to state subsidy and discount programs, recent changes to state law now allow some utility services providers to include broadband discounts as part of existing utility discount programs. Signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee in 2021, the Public Broadband Act allows local governmental entities—including Public Utility Districts (PUDs) and port districts—the unrestricted authority to provide Internet services to end-users, thereby classifying broadband as a basic utility, such as water and electricity.[166] This expansion of services utilities can provide to their customers creates an opportunity to make broadband services more affordable, as broadband can be incorporated into existing utility discount programs.

One such state administered utility discount program is the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) offered by the Washington State Department of Commerce, which provides funds from a federal block grant program to help low-income households in Washington maintain affordable, dependable utility services and avoid disconnection.[167] Through a network of community action agencies and local partners, local partner agencies send payments directly to eligible residents' energy utility provider, which could potentially be replicated for internet services. In 2021 and 2022, LIHEAP saw a 10% increase in applications in Washington state, demonstrating an increase in need for utility discount programs for low-income households.[168]

On the local level, Jefferson County's PUD #1 offers low-income rates for its electric and water customers and will be automatically extending discounted rates to eligible internet service customers as well, which will be available to customers who earn either 150% of the median federal poverty level or less or are over age 62 with a household income not exceeding $30,000 per year. Eligible customers can receive both ACP and JPUD low-income benefits, meaning some low-income customers could receive 150/150 Mbps internet for only $15 per mo. Additional information on other planned affordability programs from PUDs, port districts, and tribal and local government entities is included in **Appendix 7.4**.

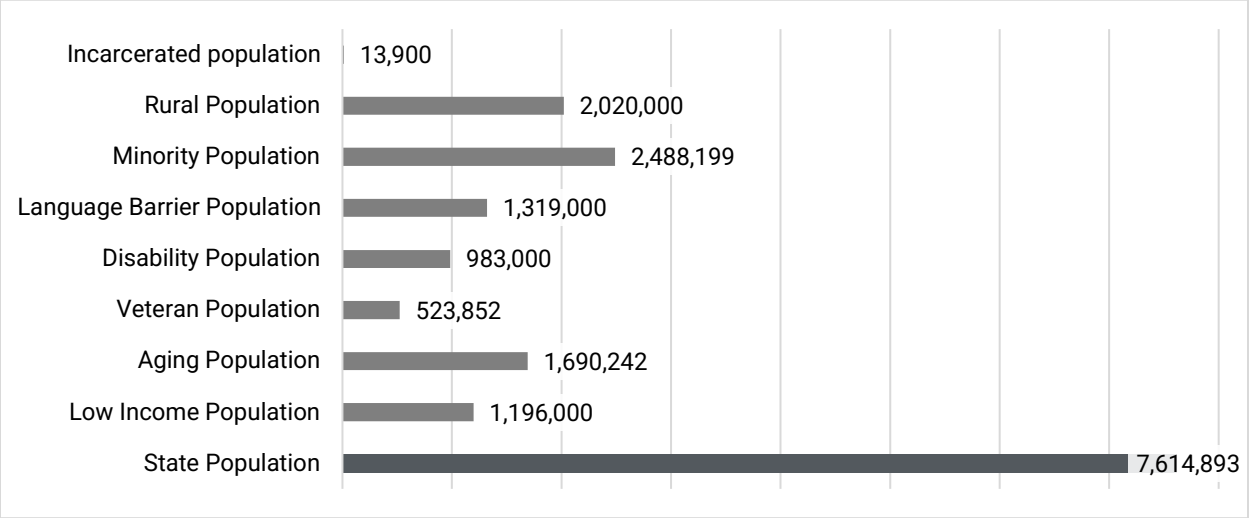
[165] Comcast (May 11, 2022), Comcast Makes ACP Program Available at Washington State Retail Locations. Accessed at: https://washington.comcast.com/2022/05/11/comcast-makes-acp-program-available-at-washington-state-retail-locations/.
[166] Washington Public Utility Districts Association (2021), New laws take effect in Washington State aimed at bridging the digital divide. Accessed at: https://www.wpuda.org/retail-broadband-laws-go-into-effect-july-25--2021.
[167] Washington State Department of Commerce (n.d.), Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growing-the-economy/energy/low-income-home-energy-assistance/
[168] Farrah Jadran (February 1, 2023), More people applied for Washington's low-income utility bill assistance program in 2021, 2022. Accessed at: More apply for Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) | king5.com

Ultimately, there are a range of programs and initiatives underway in Washington state that the WSBO will continue to leverage to promote and expand broadband affordability. This section is not an exhaustive overview of every broadband affordability asset in the state, but it provides insight as to where BEAD funding may be disbursed to maximize community impacts. Scaling affordability programs, expanding assistance for ACP applications, and building awareness of the program, increasing public recognition of affordability resources, and working with local and tribal governments to identify opportunities to work with ISPs to decrease service costs are all ways the WSBO can endeavor to improve broadband affordability.

3.2 *Needs Assessment*

Every covered population has unique needs and distinct barriers to accessing, affording, and adopting broadband services. In Washington state, 75.5% of the state's population falls with the NTIA-defined "covered population," with racial and ethnic minority populations and rural populations making up the largest covered populations within the state, as **Figure 3** shows.[169] Therefore, in an effort to hear directly from each population about the needs and experiences of accessing the internet, the WSBO collaborated with community partners, WSU-Extension, and state and local government representatives, to partner with or host more than 40 events. These engagements took place at local meeting spaces, schools, buses, parking lots, and on Zoom and social media sites to meet communities where they gather and hear from those that may not traditionally engage in government-led outreach. In addition to the WSBO-led public engagement, the needs assessment featured in this chapter also includes information from the Digital Equity Forum's digital technology survey, which gathered and analyzed responses from approximately 3,000 Washingtonians. More details on the Public Engagement process can be found in **Section 4.1**.

Figure 3: Washington State Covered Populations[170]



Note: This table does not include youth in foster care and those experiencing housing instability due to data limitations and since those populations are specific to Washington state legislation not included in the Digital Equity NOFO.

[169] US Census defines racial minorities as those who identify as a race other than White alone or as Hispanic or Latino of any race.
[170] U.S Census (2023), Digital Equity Act Population Viewer. Accessed at: https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42.

Based on the information gathered at these in-person and online engagements, along with data provided by Community Action Plans and other reports on the state's digital equity efforts, the WSBO has documented the needs and barriers that impact covered populations' ability to access, afford, and adopt broadband. The following section is organized into two sections – systemic needs and unique needs – that highlight the similarities, uniqueness, and intersectionality of the needs across Washington state.

- **Systemic needs:** needs that are out of the control of any individual and are the result of historical, political, and/or economic policies.
- **Unique needs:** needs that are specific to the covered population or particularly notable across populations.

Although **Section 3.2.2** discusses the needs related to each covered population, it is important to acknowledge that populations are not monolithic, and that each individual has unique challenges that can impact their experience with broadband and digital skills. Where appropriate, intersectional needs (needs that are compounded based on overlapping identities) are included in the analysis. The intersectional needs are non-exhaustive, and various populations can experience similar needs, even if not directly indicated. While characterizations like "covered populations" are helpful to identify trends, this section is not intended to invalidate anyone's experience, especially those who identify with multiple covered populations.

3.2.1 Systemic Needs

Systemic needs are needs that are beyond the control of any individual. These needs are often the result of historical, political, and/or economic policies. Systemic needs are complex and need to be addressed through multiple avenues, such as: acknowledging and providing reparations for generational harms; building trust through transparency and demonstrating a willingness to learn from and work alongside impacted populations; developing new partnerships; allocating or redistributing adequate resources; and proposing policy changes to address the root of the need. The systemic needs listed below impact all covered populations. Addressing these needs equitably is required to bridge the digital divide.

> "I did a speed test at my daughter's. She lives in Poulsbo. It was 256 megabytes, and she pays $50 a month. I'm going to be paying tomorrow $65 for 12 megabytes. That's not equitable."
>
> —Okanogan listening session participant

NEED FOR AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE OPTIONS

A key theme that emerged from public engagement events and Community Action Plans is that cost is a barrier to obtaining internet services. These sources stated that one's zip code should not limit one's opportunities for affordable service. While other systemic issues such as geographic terrain, population density, and infrastructure deployment contribute to the price Washington consumers pay for broadband access, many communities were displeased with the disparity in affordability between rural and urban communities and wanted to better understand options for reliable and affordable service. Additionally, many focus groups participants felt that broadband service within their community was expensive, making broadband service seem like more of a luxury than an essential component to participate in today's digital society.

Although programs like the federal ACP offer subsidized internet service, many Washingtonians have not taken advantage of its offerings either because they are unaware of the program, have trouble applying for it, cannot access it because their service provider does not accept the program, or they simply may not qualify for the subsidy based on their income. Focus group participants also commented on a lack of enrollment due to the complicated application. Internet service providers provided their comments on why some may not accept ACP, citing its complicated administrative process as a main deterrent. One participant in Sunnyside commented that "[My] bill was about $94 per month. That's a lot for me, because I don't qualify for those subsidy programs, doesn't mean that the prices aren't too high for me." With the ACP eligible households qualify for a $30 per month subsidy, or up to $75 per eligible household on tribal lands. According to the Universal Service Administrative Co. ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker, Washington has an estimated 1,125,000 eligible households, however, approximately 307,000 are currently enrolled.[171] Although additional messaging and campaigns may increase ACP enrollment, relying solely on the ACP would not solve the problem of affordable service.

It should be noted that ACP cannot be counted on to support affordability. Aside from the shortcomings listed above (difficulty in enrolling, lack of awareness, etc.) ACP is federally funded and at this point, it is uncertain if ACP will be refunded once its current funding is exhausted. Exhaustion dates vary from mid-2024 to the end of 2024. Therefore, for affordability to be promoted and sustainable, it is incumbent upon ISPs to offer low-income plans that are robust, easy to acquire, and offer speeds of at least 100 Mbps/20 Mbps.

Additionally, due to the lack of competition in some areas, there can be fewer affordable options for low-income households and no alternative to ISPs increasing prices at their own discretion. Multiple focus group participants expressed frustration with increased prices for broadband service year after year. Focus group participants commented that they were unaware their price would increase. A participant in Okanogan stated that " [ISPs] come in and talk a cheap price for a year and then jack it up." Washingtonians, especially those in rural areas, have little recourse if their provider increases the price. Many Washington residents expressed dissatisfaction with prohibitive costs, emphasizing that there are often limited options to change to another provider.

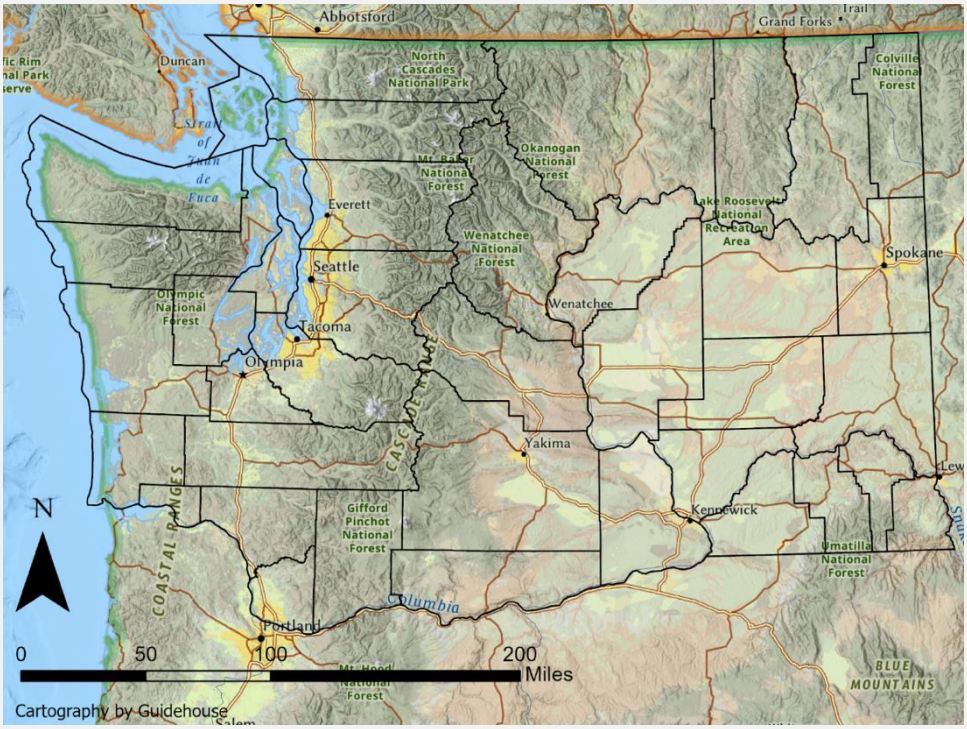
> "Mind you, I'm paying for this now. I'm paying $170 for buffering. And then I try Amazon Prime, can't get it. So I go over to Hulu, HBO Max-- I'm paying for all of that, too! That's extra! I'm paying for all these services and I'm not getting anything!"
>
> *—Oak Harbor listening session participant*

Lastly, there are Washingtonians that experience unreliable service, including service disruptions, network congestion, and outages. Many focus group participants expressed that even if they upgrade their service, or pay for the next tier of speed, that they are still left with constant disruption. A participant in Moses Lake stated, "I have the fastest internet package available and still have issues with it. Technicians come out and there are still issues after that."

[171] Universal Service Administrative Co. (July 2023), ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker. Accessed at: https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#enrollment-by-state

NEED GEOGRAPHICALLY DIVERSE BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Washington state's diverse topographical and geographical makeup benefits its residents and communities in many ways, but it also presents challenges and barriers to broadband infrastructure expansion. For example, in Pacific County, which lies on the western coast of the state, the proximity to the Pacific Ocean means that high wind events are common and winter storms typically include hours of 40-80 mph winds. These high wind events cause trees to fall, damaging lines and structures used for aerial fiber optic infrastructure. Similarly, although wireless technologies are less expensive than fiber, they are more susceptible to hazardous weather, such as rain, wind, salt spray, and snow and therefore more likely to experience equipment malfunction and signal interference, which can make wireless technologies more expensive to maintain. Although buried, fiber optic cables would therefore appear to be the more viable option, Pacific County's topography – which also includes mountainous landscape with heavily forested areas, dense canopy cover, numerous wetlands, and geologic hazard areas – any construction project requires significant planning and expensive hardening of in-ground broadband infrastructure.[172] **Map 6** below illustrates the topography of the state.



Map 6: Topographic Map of Washington state

Source: ESRI's National Geographic base map.

[172] Pacific County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Pacific_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box

On the opposite end of the state in Asotin County – with completely different topography – which creates its own set of geographic challenges to broadband deployment. Asotin County has difficult terrain with severe elevation changes – including North America's deepest river gorge – which makes construction of high-speed broadband expensive and complicated. The county also experiences frequent forest or wildland fires, limiting the viability of aerial infrastructure; underground fiber optic and pole installation is challenging due to underlying basalt rock formations.[173] Ultimately, Washington's diverse topography is an obstacle, and calls for additional review and careful planning when expanding broadband infrastructure due to the difference in construction requirements.

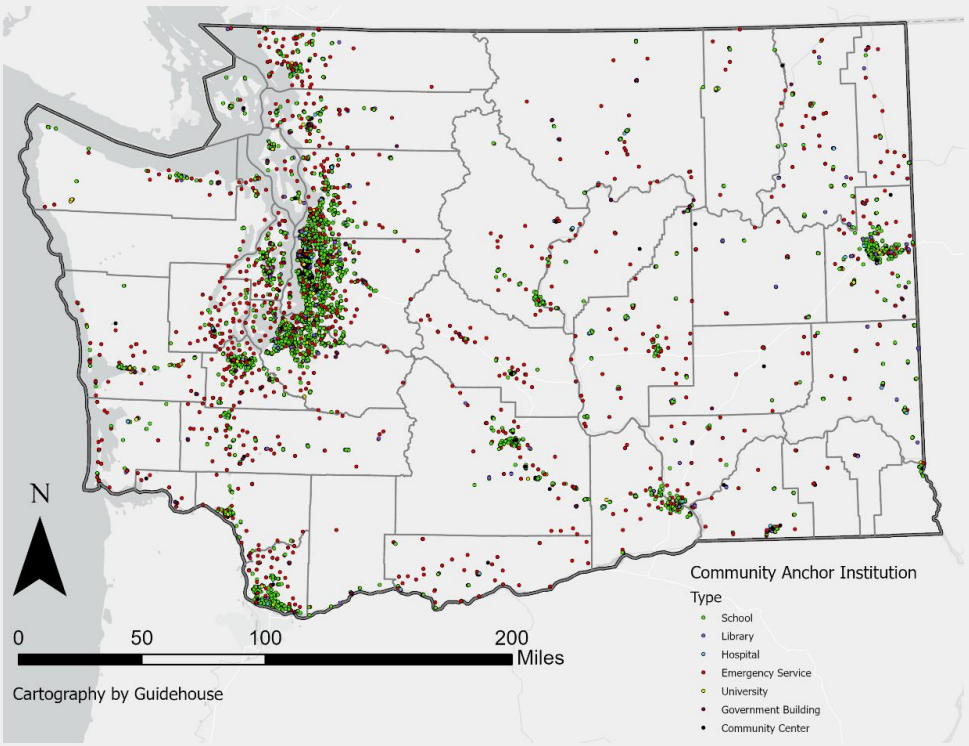
NEED RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) play a critical role in serving local communities. Institutions such as libraries, schools, and nonprofits provide resources like books and computers, serve as community gathering locations, and act as trusted institutions for information sharing across Washington state, as **Map 7** shows. Many of the events during public engagement intentionally took place at locations that are considered CAIs after considering the cross-cutting populations that frequent these spaces. From families with kids needing print outs for homework, to young adults in foster care participating in Adult 101 classes, to people experiencing housing instability using the library's Wi-Fi to know the hours that the soup kitchen is open for the night, CAIs can act as critical resources and can be well connected to their local community.

Types of CAIs Outlined in the DE Notice of Funding

The term "community anchor institution" means 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.

[173] Asotin County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Asotin_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box



Map 7: Community Anchor Institutions in Washington

Source: Analysis of Washington state data as of 2015.

Many of the Community Action Plans applauded their CAIs for providing digital equity services, but also stated that many institutions are understaffed and under resourced. Skamania County,[174] like many of the other Community Action Plans, found in **Appendix 7.3**, highlighted that although the county has digital equity assets, community centers and nonprofits need staff with technology related skills to serve the digital needs of the community. This is especially true for CAIs that serve specific covered populations, such as senior centers or schools, which may not have the resources, staffing, or hours of operation to provide dedicated programs to teach and support digital learning effectively.

Many of the CAIs also provide devices to communities. For example, some schools in Kitsap County run mobile hot spot programs, yet the county identified a need to expand resources so that all schools within their district can provide this critical resource.[175] Libraries can also offer computers, laptops, as well as tablets, yet it is evident that they need additional resources to ensure their devices are functional and up to date to help with digital learning.

To combat some of the resourcing challenges, some counties are expanding partnerships with CAIs that do not traditionally offer digital equity programming to fill resource gaps. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic when libraries were closed, Stevens County partnered with a health clinic that was under construction to create public Wi-Fi areas, tables, and safety equipment so the community could continue to access digital services safely.[176]

[174] Skamania County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Skamania_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[175] Kitsap County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Kitsap_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[176] Stevens County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Stevens_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box

NEED TO ADDRESS OVERLAPPING BARRIERS

It is difficult to address the need for broadband access, affordability, and adoption without understanding the interconnection of barriers impacting covered populations, such as lack of housing, public and private transportation options, and other quality of life barriers.

Samish Indian Nation Community Action Plan, like many other Community Action Plans, stated that community members are experiencing a negative spiral due to not having broadband, and that the lack of broadband access has resulted in a lack of access to social services, consistent employment, or local housing opportunities.[177] Due to the transition to online servicing for social service agencies, job and apartment searches and applications, a lack of access to broadband can impact one's ability to address other barriers within their life.

Additionally, many Washingtonians, especially those in rural area, are miles away from a CAI, limiting access to digital resources and support. Grant County has a population of approximately 100,000, yet most of their digital literacy classes, training programs, and other digital services are offered in Moses Lake, a city within Grant County.[178] Therefore, residents in other cities within the county need transportation to travel to access those resources, which can be difficult for low-income populations or individuals with disabilities.

[177] Samish Indian Nation (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Samish_Indian_Nation_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box

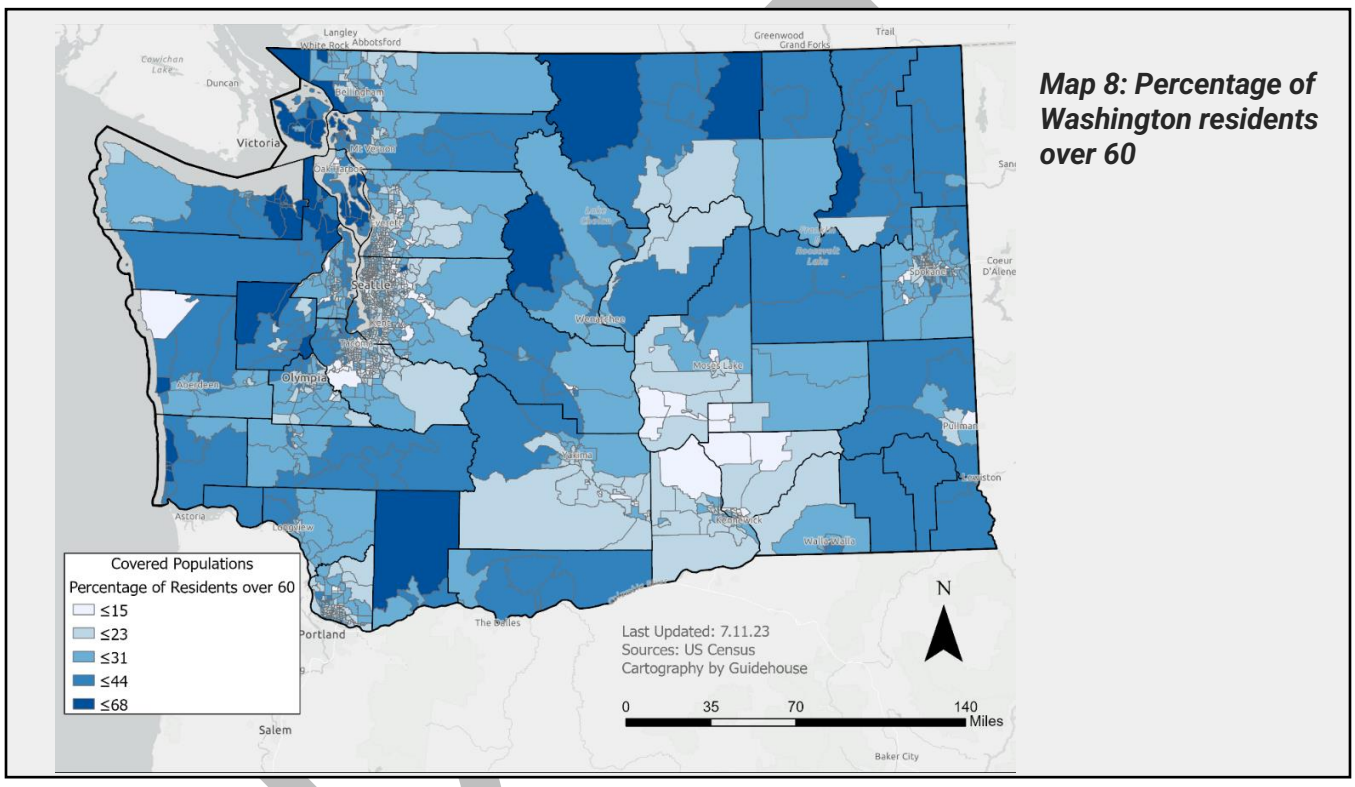
[178] Grant County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Grant_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box

3.2.2 Covered Population Needs Assessment

The needs below are the most pressing needs identified specific to each covered population. However, intersectional identities can result in these needs compounding or intersecting across covered populations, impacting people's day-to-day lived experiences.

3.2.2.1 Aging individuals

In Washington state, 22% of residents are over the age of 60. Aging individuals in Washington are predominantly white (97%) and receive their income from Social Security (74%). A majority of aging individuals in Washington are also considered low-income based on the federal poverty rate (86%). **Map 8** and **Table 21** highlight the counties where there are large concentrations of aging individuals.



Map 8: Percentage of Washington residents over 60

Table 21: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of People Aged 60+ Years Old

County	% 60+ Years Old
Jefferson	47.1
Wahkiakum	43.8
San Juan	43.1
Pacific	39.7
Clallam	37.8

NEED TO PROTECT PRIVACY AND SAFETY ONLINE

According to the FBI, aging adults lose the most money to cybercrimes, compared to other age demographics. Adults aged 60+ lost $1.7 billion dollars in 2021, a 74% increase from 2021.[179] In Washington state, phishing scams target seniors by duplicating official documents or government websites. A senior in Ocean Shores mentioned how due to previous hacking attempts, they usually call after receiving information via email stating, "The bank won't get upset with you if you call to verify that the information is from them." While calling the bank is one method for ensuring safety online, seniors need more protections when using the internet.

Lack of online security has also left seniors reluctant to use online resources. Online shopping has increased over the years with about 80% of the U.S. population shopping online. However, some seniors do not feel comfortable using the internet to make purchases. During a focus group in Port Angeles, a participant commented that because they are not confident with their internet security, they do not buy things online. Additionally, data shows that seniors represent the smallest demographic of online shoppers (28%) suggesting that barriers such as safety, comfortability with the internet, and reliable access may be contributing factors to the low utilization.

> "I don't give out my information about banking or anything or credit card information. I'll go to the bank."
>
> -Tacoma focus group participant

NEED TO FEEL INDEPENDENT

Many seniors mentioned that having fast and reliable internet access provides seniors with the opportunity to age in place, defined as the ability to live in one's own home independently and comfortably. This includes being able to access information, like local weather alerts, checking in with family and friends, as well as controlling home security centers. While phone services can be used to access information like wildfire alerts, in rural areas with multiple dead zones for mobile phone coverage and unreliable land-line service, seniors need internet access to stay connected.

Seniors in rural areas also need broadband to access critical healthcare services that may not be available otherwise without having to travel long distances. A participant in Forks commented that the town has limited specialty doctors and that access to fast, reliable internet is needed to use telehealth services. The ability to video conference medical professionals allows seniors to choose where they live while still having access to the services that they need.

[179] AARP (2021), Older Americans' Cybercrime Losses Soared to $3 Billion in 2021. Accessed at: https://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/info-2022/fbi-elder-fraud-report.htm

NEED TO AFFORD INTERNET ON A FIXED INCOME

Currently, most U.S. households pay an average of $75 per month for fixed internet service. With 73% of seniors in Washington on Social Security income, about $568 a month in Washington state, $75 for broadband service can be considered too expensive. While ACP offers a $30 a month subsidy, or up to $75 per eligible household on tribal lands, seniors may have difficulties enrolling in the program, due to a complicated two-step enrollment process, lack of availability through their ISP, or general unawareness of the program. In addition to accessing internet services, access to affordable up-to-date digital devices is also necessary for seniors with rapidly evolving technology. Increases in monthly costs such as a plan rate increase or the need to replace a device can also be a major budgetary concern for seniors who are on a fixed income who may have a more challenging time adjusting to higher consumer prices than individuals who are still actively employed.

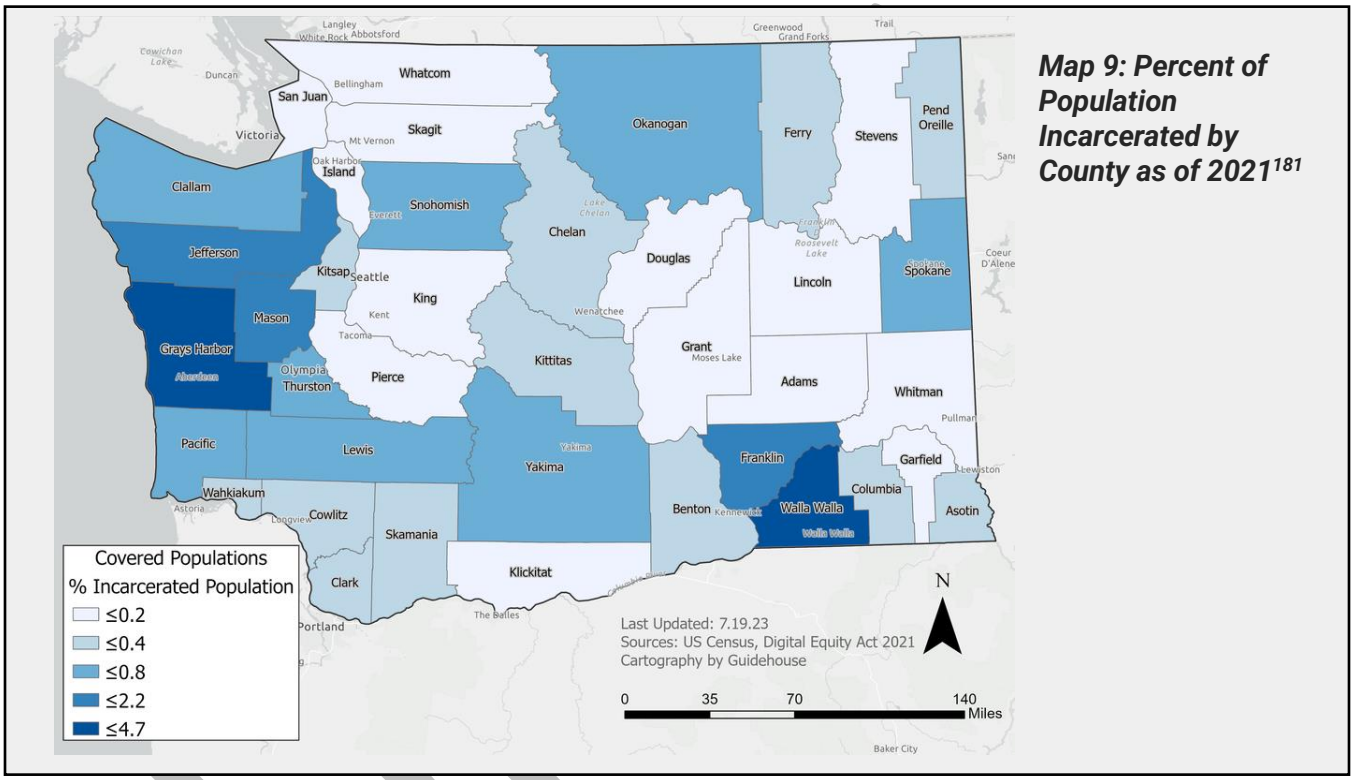
NEED FOR ACCESS TO DIGITAL SKILL TRAINING

In research done by the National Library of Medicine, 8% of adults aged 65-74 reported having above basic digital skills compared to 60% of those aged 16-24. During public engagement, many seniors commented on needing improved digital skills to feel more comfortable and safer online, yet many spoke about the difficulty and hesitancy in adapting to the technology. One participant in Oak Harbor commented, "I'm old. I don't like change. I want my life to be easier, not harder, and this is driving me nuts to almost wanting to take the computer and throw it across the room."

Digital skills are essential for participating in today's digital society through activities such as searching and applying for jobs, accessing benefits, or engaging with friends and family on social networks. While digital skilling programs exist at community anchor institutions within Washington, it may be difficult for some seniors to access services. During public engagement, many seniors expressed the desire for in-person digital skill training to have a head-on learning experience. However, as **Map 8** previously displayed, there are higher percentages of older adults in rural areas of Washington state, result resulting in additional barriers, such as lack of in-person digital skills resources, lack of devices or broadband service, and inability to travel to community anchor organizations. Many of the Community Action Plans identified assets like senior centers, as places where seniors gather and trust, but many don't have dedicated staff to provide digital skill trainings.

3.2.2.2 Incarcerated individuals

Washington state has approximately 14,000 individuals in confinement as of June 30, 2023, with 92% in a state prison and the rest in reentry centers, community parenting alternatives, or in-state rented beds.[180] **Map 9** shows the percentage of incarcerated individuals by county. Notably some of the less populated counties have relatively high percentages of incarcerated residents relative to their population, such as Grays Harbor and Walla Walla.



Map 9: Percent of Population Incarcerated by County as of 2021[181]

Table 22: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of Incarcerated Individuals

County	% Incarcerated Population
Walla Walla	4.7
Grays Harbor	3.5
Franklin	2.2
Jefferson	1.9
Mason	1.3

[175] Washington State Department of Corrections, Agency Fact Card (2023). Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/docs/publications/reports/100-RE004.pdf

[181] Note: This map does not factor in Washington's adjusted redistricting data with people incarcerated in state prisons reallocated to their home addresses

The justice system across the country has a profoundly disparate impact on communities of color and Washington state has faced similar inequities – with a disproportionately higher percentage of Black, Latino and American Indian people incarcerated.[182] In 2017, the incarceration rate of Black adults in Washington was more than five times that of white adults.[183] Given that these racial and ethnic groups additionally struggle with fewer economic opportunities in Washington and are disproportionately impacted by poverty, the brunt of the financial burden from incarceration falls onto these communities and further exacerbates their day-to-day struggles.[184]

Through focus groups, the WSBO was able to engage with formerly incarcerated individuals to identify needs within the facilities. These individuals were open about the challenges they faced when it came to digital connectivity and access to internet or technology basics. Below are consolidated insights, and research to align their experiences with evidence-based findings from a myriad of sources talking about technology in correction facilities.

NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE INTERNET CONNECTION WITHIN FACILITIES

President Joe Biden has said that the majority of incarcerated Americans deserve a bona fide second chance at life – but incarcerated individuals need some form of internet access to have a chance of successfully reentering today's tech-driven society.[185] Currently, the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) does not permit incarcerated individuals access to the internet, as there are concerns about incarcerated individuals using the internet to conduct illegal activity.[186] In fact, as our society becomes increasingly internet-dependent, the internet is also being used to facilitate gang violence and drug trafficking and providing those currently incarcerated with the potential to continue criminal activities while incarcerated, posing security and safety concerns for the DOC. On the other hand, a lack of internet access is an issue for re-entry purposes when so much of modern life is carried out digitally. This will require a delicate balance between ensuring the safety of the incarcerated and Washington communities, and providing incarcerated individuals the opportunity to learn, communicate with friends and family, and prepare for reentry into society.

[182] Vera Institute of Justice (2019), Incarceration Trends in Washington. Accessed at https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-washington.pdf
[183] American Civil Liberties Union (2019), A Smart Justice Profile of Washington's Prison System. Accessed at: https://50stateblueprint.aclu.org/assets/reports/SJ-Blueprint-WA.pdf
[184] Economic Policy Institute (2020), Racial disparities in income and poverty remain largely unchanged amid strong income growth in 2019. Accessed at: https://www.epi.org/blog/racial-disparities-in-income-and-poverty-remain-largely-unchanged-amid-strong-income-growth-in-2019/
[185] White House (2023), A Proclamation on Second Chance Month. Accessed at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/03/31/a-proclamation-on-second-chance-month-2023/
[186] Department of Corrections. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/corrections/incarceration/technology-provider.htm

A pilot program in 2019 gave incarcerated students access to the internet for the first time in state history, allowing them to receive their Tacoma Community College certificate in web development.[187] The coding class had been offered before, but this was the first-time students had access to secure websites that were screened and closely monitored while in use. A student told KOMO News, "Being able to actually use the internet while we were here, although it's secured, I was able to use the things that I need for when I get out."[188]

"It can be hard to keep up with changes in technology even when you're experiencing them firsthand. When you're locked away, it's virtually impossible."

— Tacoma focus group participant

Correctional institutions determine the resources available for incarcerated individuals to access the outside world, including access to phone calls, emails, or video calls. Consideration is needed for how to scale up access to affordable internet services and devices for incarcerated individuals to stay in communication with friends and family.[189]

NEED FOR MODERN DIGITAL DEVICE EQUIPMENT

"[A woman] just got out [of prison last Thursday] so she's trying to get adapted with how to use an iPhone."

— Tacoma focus group participant

Currently, incarcerated individuals in Washington have limited access to computer equipment. Facilities will often have computer labs or institutional libraries available for incarcerated individuals, yet the devices are frequently outdated, limited in number, only available at certain times of the day, and highly regulated and surveillance.[190] An individual shared during a focus group in Tacoma that, "You got to share [computers] with 30 other people. Sometimes up to 150," while at a carceral facility and when there are only four computers, the lines can get quite long.

Moreover, flip phones have evolved to become iPhones, desktop monitors have become laptops and tablets, and yet many incarcerated individuals who have been in facilities for multiple years have never had the opportunity to learn how to use these new digital devices. Upon release, many incarcerated individuals, particularly those who have been incarcerated prior to widespread usage of the internet, lack the knowledge and skillsets necessary to engage with the rest of society via digital devices, which has increasingly become a part of our everyday lives. For example, a 2021 Pew Research Center survey in 2021 found that 85% of Americans owned a smart phone, up from 35% when it first surveyed smartphone ownership in 2011.[191] As a participant mentioned during the public engagement events in a Tacoma, "[A woman] just got out [last Thursday] so she's trying to get adapted with how to use an iPhone." Incarcerated individuals need access to updated digital devices to optimize their ability to engage with and become accustomed to the outside world after release.

[187] Komonews (2019), Incarcerated students in Washington have access to Internet for first time. Accessed at: https://komonews.com/news/local/incarcerated-students-in-washington-have-access-to-internet-for-first-time
[188] Komonews (2019), Incarcerated students in Washington have access to Internet for first time.
[189] Department of Corrections (2022), Press Release. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/news/2022/05032022p.htm
[190] Department of Corrections (2021), Bridging a Technology Gap. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/news/2021/07072021.htm
[191] Pew Research Center (2021), Mobile Fact Sheet. Accessed at: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/

The DOC renegotiated a contract for individual technology services to "lower costs and expand services" into all state prisons, initiating the Individual Technology Services (ITS) program.[192] The program aims to provide all incarcerated individuals in Washington state prisons a new tablet, and a limited number of free weekly phone calls, monthly Video Connect sessions, and free stamps for e-messaging. The tablets will also include applications such as Podcasts, Law Library, and a suite of educational and reentry resources. Full implementation to all facilities statewide is expected to be completed by the end of 2023. As of now, however, the DOC will launch the ITS project at only two facilities to test the services. Funding may also be a limitation following the proof-of-concept project period.[193]

While a tablet program removes long lines at computer centers by providing a device to each person, tablets likely should not completely replace traditional computer labs and institutional libraries. Tablets have more limited functionality than desktop computers or laptops for performing complex tasks that may be required for education and training programs.

NEED FOR WIDELY ACCESSIBLE DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Incarcerated individuals often lack the digital skills necessary to benefit from internet connectivity upon release, such as accessing government services, job and housing applications, and cybersecurity tools.[194] Currently in Washington state, one of the most common ways to gain access to digital devices and potentially the internet is to be enrolled in an educational program, through DOC's partnership with the Washington state Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), Washington's Community and Technical colleges, and the Evergreen State College.[195] These programs provide opportunities for justice-involved individuals to complete high school, prepare for college, and learn high-wage and high-demand workforce skills in college credit-bearing certificate and degree programs.[196] From 2020-2021, Washington state corrections education increased laptop capacity by 60% yet these laptops work only in an off-line internet environment.[197] Adult basic education programs are also available in every prison, providing a foundational education in reading, writing, math, and the English language.[198]

> "[Digital skills] are all skills that have become life skills and if you don't have support [when you're out of prison…], then tough luck."
>
> *– Tacoma focus group participant*

[192] Department of Corrections, Individual Technology Services. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/corrections/services/technology.htm
[193] Department of Corrections, Incarcerated Individual Betterment Fund. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/corrections/services/betterment-fund.htm
[194] WIRED (2023), Inmates Need Internet to Prepare for Life after Prison. Accessed at: https://www.wired.com/story/inmates-need-internet-to-prepare-for-life-after-prison/
[195] Washington Community and Technical Colleges (2023), Washington College in Prisons Program. Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programsservices/prisons/.
[196] Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) (2022), Corrections Education. Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/programs-services/corrections/fy-21-corrections-education-annual-report.pdf
[197] SBCTC (2022)
[198] SBCTC (2022)

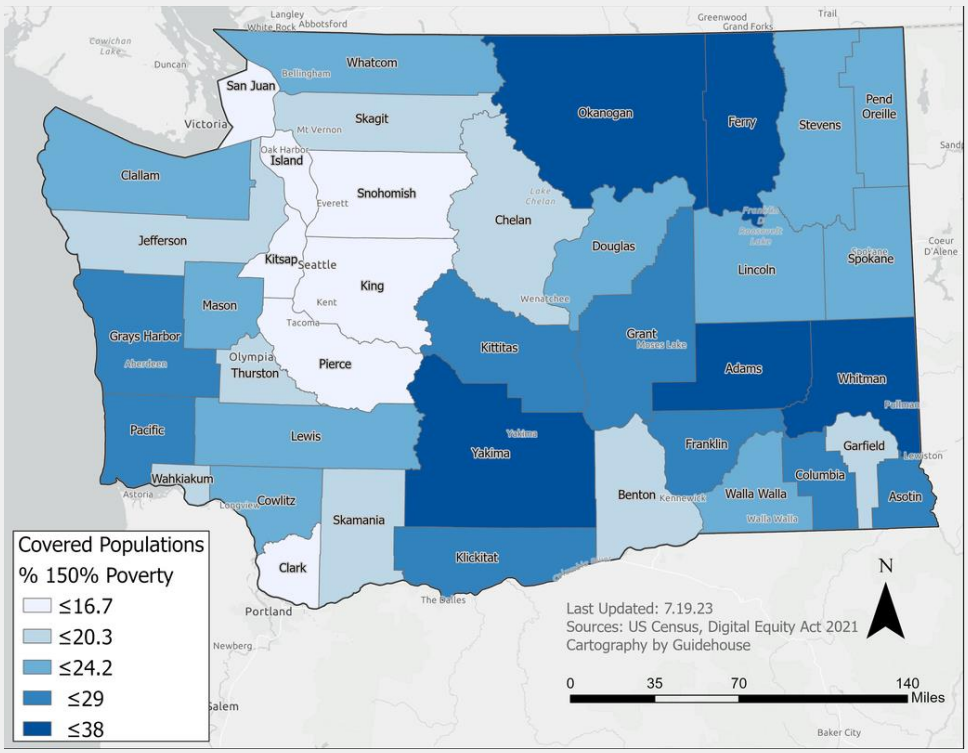
However, currently, there is a gap in universal digital skills training available to incarcerated individuals in Washington, which is particularly crucial in the window of time when they are preparing for reentry. Digital skills are crucial for being able to engage with, contribute to, and safely navigate the world outside of prison walls. Participants voiced their concerns during the public engagement efforts, by stating that, "[Digital skills] are all skills that have become life skills and if you don't have support [when you're out of prison…], then tough luck." Without knowing how to use the technology of today, a participant shared that they, "couldn't apply for a job, look for a place, look for resources since the application for Department of Social and Health Services is online. Otherwise, you have to stay on the phone for three hours. Then they want to email you. And then you have to upload the document,"—all things that can be incredibly challenging without basic digital skills. Another participant shared that "you need to have an email and you need to have internet, [as if] these are necessities even if you don't know how to navigate them." The DOC has a Reentry Navigator program, which includes training topics related to using email and other digital security topics, but the classes are limited in duration and are currently not able to go in-depth into most digital skills individuals will need upon release.[199]

Incarcerated individuals need to be able to navigate the current conditions of modern life, which has increasingly become technologically reliant and digitally based. Digital skills training with the appropriate, up-to-date technology and internet access for training to be able to learn about navigating resources, researching, and staying connected with loved ones can help ease the transition from incarceration.

[199] Interview with DOC staff on June 2, 2023.

3.2.2.3 Low-income households

In Washington, 10% of the population lives in poverty according to the U.S. Census Bureau.[200] The Census Bureau uses a set of income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty.[201] If a family's total income is less than the poverty threshold for that family size, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty**. Map 10** and **Table 23** show the distribution of low-income households across the state of Washington, while emphasizing the top five counties with the highest percentage of low-income households.



Map 10: Percent of Population with an Income Below 150% of the FPL by County

Table 23: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of People Experiencing Living Below 150% of the FPL

County	% Below 150% of FPL
Adams	38
Whitman	37.8
Okanogan	32.4
Yakima	32.4
Ferry	30.8

[200] U.S, Census Bureau (2022), Quick facts Washington. Accessed at: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/WA/PST045222

[201] U.S. Census Bureau (2023), How the Census Bureau Measures Poverty. Accessed at: https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html

Due to compounding socioeconomic and racial inequities that exist in the United States, low-income households often struggle with additional vulnerabilities besides their income level, such as living in rural areas, having a disability, having limited English proficiency, being a veteran or an aging individual, etc. Therefore, as the needs in this report are established, low-income individuals also have similar needs as other covered populations due to the intersectional nature of these identities. Nevertheless, three notable needs have been identified for low-income households.

NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE INTERNET SERVICE PACKAGES

"Internet providers are willing to accept [ACP] but I didn't want to have them do that for three megabytes. It's just not worth it in the end."

–White Salmon focus group participant

In the state of Washington, several programs exist to help make internet access more affordable for low-income individuals such as the ACP and Lifeline Program. Several ISPs additionally have their own low-income packages for inexpensive service offerings, as previously described in **Table 20**. However, these packages frequently have low internet speeds and restrictive data caps. Several participants voiced their frustrations with low-income packages that had been offered by school districts, the ACP, or individual ISPs, claiming that the services rarely worked and would often spend more time buffering, lagging, or dropping than being useful.

As such, there is a need to ensure that ISPs are encouraged to provide accessible, affordable internet service packages that also ensure reliable internet connections without data caps, and if receiving BEAD or Digital Equity Program funding, requiring that low-cost plans meet minimum speed and reliability requirements. Low-income households deserve to be able to access the internet without being concerned about the service dropping or lagging. Larger households where multiple people need to access the internet at the same time, experience a more limited ability to stream movies, join online classrooms, work remotely, do homework, communicate with friends and family, or use social media when using internet packages available for low-income families.

"I have the $10 plan through my school district, but it never works. My kids have been penalized for not being able to turn in homework or complete online tasks in time."

–Sunnyside focus group participant

NEED FOR INCREASED PROMOTION OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES

As previously mentioned, several programs offering assistance and resources are available to low-income households in Washington provided by federal, state, and local governments as well as nonprofit organizations. These include digital navigator programs, services provided through community anchor institutions, free public Wi-Fi hotspots, and a number of other digital skills and device loaning programs serving the state's covered populations. However, during the WSBO's public engagement period, it was evident that these resources are not being utilized as widely as they could be. These needs were further emphasized in the Community Action Plans submitted by counties and Tribes. For example, Walla Walla County stated that a barrier preventing the provision of digital equity support services through their region is, "staffing and funding for outreach for organizations to increase awareness of the challenge and to encourage [internet] adoption."[202]

Awareness is essential for low-income households to utilize digital inclusion assets and resources that are publicly available, and many people are not aware that these resources exist. Individuals may also be too embarrassed to request assistance or have other barriers that limit them from accessing the plethora of digital inclusion resources that the state of Washington has compiled. Therefore, it is crucial that the WSBO and other partnering organizations engaged in digital equity work also continue to expand their promotional material and outreach efforts to engage low-income households and other covered populations to help them access these resources and programs. An outreach and engagement strategy will be discussed in **Section 4.1**.

NEED FOR AFFORDABLE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT

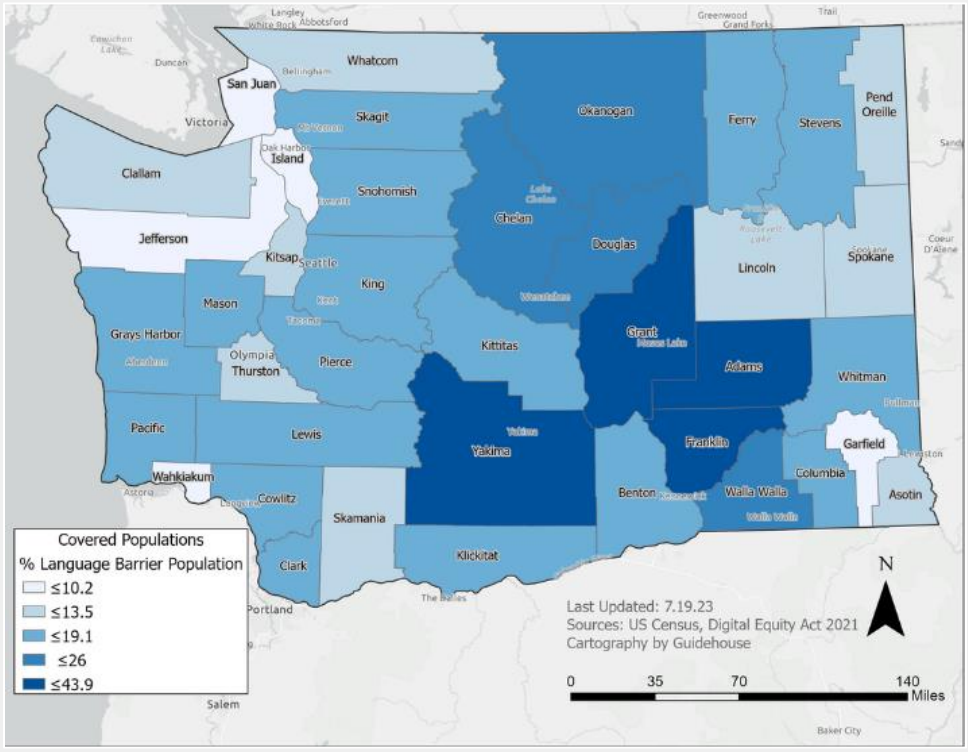
The reliance on smartphones is very common for low-income households and other covered populations that struggle to afford updated computer equipment.[203] The public engagement found that many low-incomes individuals struggled with accessing digital devices other than smart phones, particularly low-income racial or ethnic minorities according to a representative of the Asian, Hispanic, African American, and Native American community who spoke at the Spokane listening session. He said, "my community relies on the phone. That is their main source of internet."

Cellular data plans are typically more affordable and accessible for low-income individuals, and the average smartphone also costs less than the average computer or laptop. For individuals using the internet daily to communicate, access social media, find directions, or lookup information, a smartphone can be especially useful and affordable. However, this reliance can negatively affect those who need computer equipment for other activities that require a large screen, such as online schooling, working remotely, filling out forms etc. Therefore, low-income individuals need affordable computer equipment to fully utilize internet access to its fullest extent. This can include not just the computer itself, but accessories that help people conduct critical activities such as mice, keyboards, headsets, webcams, etc. These peripheral accessories can be especially crucial for conducting work, education, and telehealth related activities.

[202] Walla Walla County (2023), Community Action Plans. Accessed at: Walla_Walla_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[203] Pew Research Center (2021), Digital divide persists even as Americans with lower incomes make gains in tech adoption. Accessed at: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/06/22/digital-divide-persists-even-as-americans-with-lower-incomes-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/

3.2.2.4 Individuals with language barriers

U.S. Census Bureau data indicate that a sizable percentage of Washington residents have limited proficiency in English and speak another language at home. In Washington state, 20% of its population speak a language other than English at home, and about 8% of individuals speak English less than very well, according to the ACS 5-Year Estimates data from the U.S. Census.[204] That amounts to more than 1.45 million individuals speaking a language other than English at home, and over 547,000 individuals who have limited English language proficiency.[205] **Map 11** shows the percent of each county's population that has a language barrier.

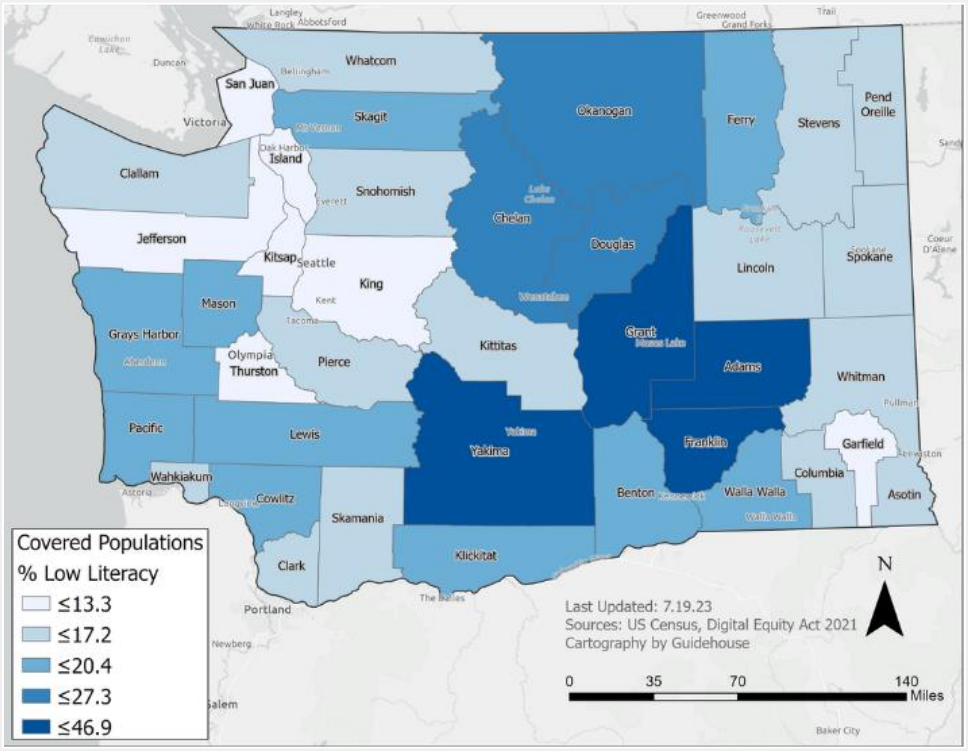


Map 11: Percent of Population with a Language Barrier by County

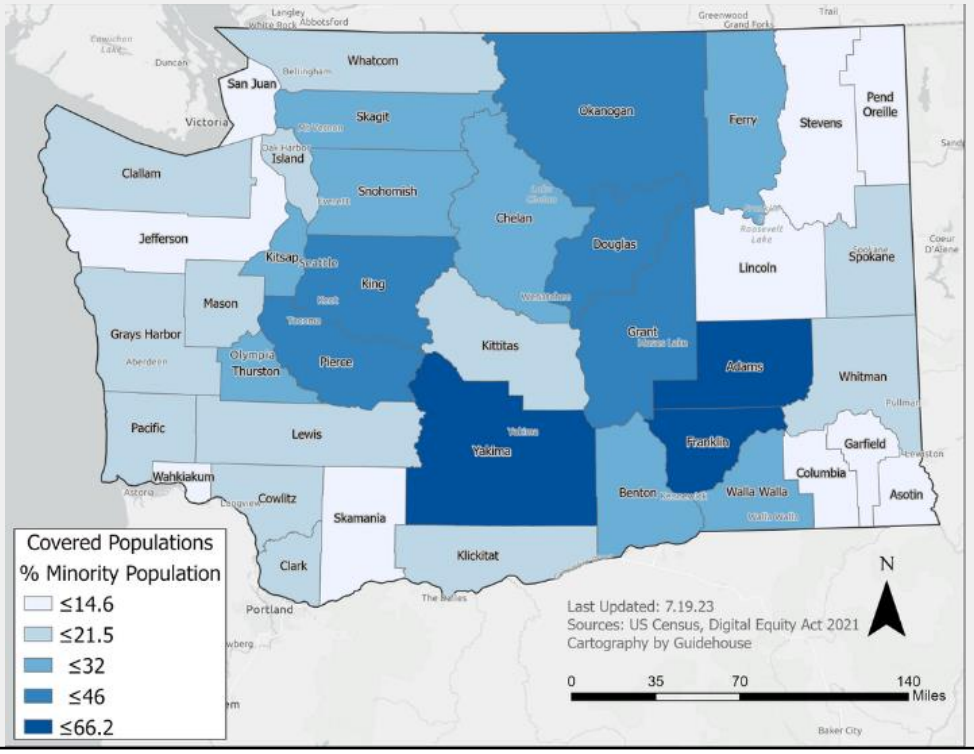
Additionally, there is a notable intersection between low literacy rates and limited English proficiency, due to multiple factors that may impede this population's ability to access resources. This may include minimal or inefficient schooling, exacerbated by socioeconomic and racial inequalities in the U.S. Research also indicates that a mother's education is the most important indicator of her child's future educational achievement. If a child's parent is illiterate, the parent will not be able to teach her child to read, increasing the likelihood that a child will be illiterate as well. **Map 11, Map 12,** and **Map 13** show how the percent of a population that is low literacy by county also coincides with counties with the highest percentage of immigrants and racial/ethnic minorities such as Yakima County, Adams County, and Franklin County.

[204] U.S. Census Bureau, Languages Spoken at Home. Accessed at: https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/language/

[205] U.S. Census Bureau (2021), Selected Social Characteristics in the United States. Access at: https://data.census.gov/table?tid=ACSDP5Y2021.DP02&g=040XX00US53&hidePreview=true



Map 12: Percent of Population with Low Literacy by County



Map 13: Percent of Population that is a Racial or Ethnic Minority by County

Low literacy, or the ability to read relatively short texts and understand basic vocabulary and the inability to comprehend advanced texts and vocabulary, affects about 18% of U.S. adults, most commonly impacting Hispanic individuals, Black individuals, foreign-born individuals, and low-income individuals.[206] According to the Center for Immigration Studies, 41% of immigrants score at or below the lowest level of English literacy.[207] Literacy skills are at the foundation of digital skills and digital literacy. Without literacy skills, individuals will not be able to navigate digital resources and the internet generally. Therefore, this intersection between low literacy rates, racial and ethnic minorities, and people with limited English proficiency is an essential component to understanding their needs to be able to engage with the digital world.

Additionally, many entities, from government agencies to nonprofits and private businesses, use websites and digital services to provide information and services to the public.[208] This includes accepting applications, managing accounts, and offering services or products. People with language barriers need to access these websites and digital services to accomplish everyday tasks, such as paying their internet service bills, staying up to date with banking activities, and looking up the hours to their favorite restaurants or stores. Vital information displayed on digital service platforms should be accessible to individuals with language barriers in frequently encountered languages, yet that is rarely the case.[209] Therefore, the following needs have been identified for individuals with language barriers.

NEED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL LITERACY IN ADULT ENGLISH LITERACY PROGRAMS

> "Not being able to read and write and being too embarrassed to ask for help [is a barrier to accessing the internet]."
>
> *– Sunnyside listening session participant*

Currently, Basic Education for Adults programs in Washington state include Adult Basic Education to improve academic skills, English as a Second Language classes, English Literacy and Civics Education, GED/High School Equivalency, and High School Plus.[210] None of these programs, according to the SBCTC webpage, include an integrated curriculum to teach digital literacy simultaneously. However, studies show the advantages of developing digital literacy skills alongside English literacy programs. The lack of digital skills substantially inhibits people's ability to succeed in the 21st Century workforce, since and analysis finds that 92% of jobs require digital skills.[211] Yet, one-third of workers, particularly low- to middle-skilled occupations, do not have the foundational digital skills necessary to enter and thrive in today's jobs.[212] Developing digital skills, is as important as developing English literacy skills and there is an opportunity and need for the two curriculums to be integrated within programs for people with language barriers.

[206] Ballard Brief (2017), Illiteracy Among Adults in the U.S. Accessed at: https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/illiteracy-among-adults-in-the-us
[207] Center for Immigration Studies (2017), Immigrant Literacy. Accessed at: https://cis.org/Immigrant-Literacy-Self-Assessment-vs-Reality
[208] Limited English Proficiency Committee, (2021), Improving Access to Public Websites and Digital Services for Limited English Proficient Persons. Accessed at: https://www.lep.gov/sites/lep/files/media/document/2021-12/2021_12_07_Website_Language_Access_Guide_508.pdf
[209] Limited English Proficiency Committee, (2021)
[210] Washington Community and Technical Colleges, (2023), Providers of Basic Education for Adults. Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/basic-education-for-adults/providers
[211] National Skills Coalition (2023), Closing the Digital Skill Divide. Accessed at: https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/closing-the-digital-skill-divide/
[212] National Skills Coalition (2023)

NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION SERVICES FOR NAVIGATING GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED SERVICES ONLINE

Washington State Executive Order 05-03 established the use of plain talk principles for select government agencies. This includes using short sentences in clear language utilized by the intended audience.

Navigating government resources can be a complex and challenging task, even for those who are fluent in English. Individuals with language barriers face an additional layer of difficulty when trying to access and understand these resources, which may be crucial for gaining access to basic needs such as food, housing, and education. To ensure equitable access to government services and information, it is essential to provide more accessible language, multi-lingual translations, and translation service upon the request of individuals trying to communicate with the government. Accessible language is language that accommodates people of all ages and abilities, including those with cognitive disabilities, people with low literacy skills, and speakers of English as a foreign language. Plain talk and accessible language are clear, concise, and free of technical jargon that the average reader may not understand in context.[213] During the WSBO's public engagement period, Spanish-speaking participants in Sunnyside expressed their frustration with "*la lengua de abogados*," or "lawyer language." One participant explicitly said, "Things are too long and would take a whole day to understand."

Washington state is taking strides to help improve language access across a variety of sectors. For example, to ensure that all residents could access vital information related to COVID-19 Governor Inslee issued a memo for a language access plan to help state agencies streamline a process for agencies to translate vital health information into the top 37 languages spoken in the state.[214] A hotline for COVID-19 also included interpretative services. Even as the pandemic subsides, language access needs remain and public agencies may want to consider prioritization for translation services that are accurate, culturally sensitive, and accessible for vital documents such as application forms, official notices, and frequently used resources. Language helplines, interpretation services, and multi-lingual websites are necessary for people with language barriers to enable their access to critical public services.

[213] Executive Order 05-03, Plain Talk. Access at: Executive Order 05-03: Plain Talk (wa.gov)
[214] Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, Washington State Language Access Plan. Accessed at: https://capaa.wa.gov/washington-state-language-access-plan/#:~:text=Jay%20Inslee%20issued%20a%20memo,and%20with%20limited%20English%20proficiency

NEED FOR MULTI-LINGUAL TECHNICAL SUPPORT SERVICES FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Individuals with language barriers lack the ability to ask for and understand technical support from internet service providers in their spoken language. While there are community resources to assist with every-day technology issues, such as TechConnect WA that provides free technical support to Washington residents to help them engage in a virtual environment, there is a lack of accessible, multi-lingual tech support services specifically designated to assist individuals with navigating ISPs and their services. TechConnect WA is the nation's first multi-lingual, multi-cultural help desk staffed by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) technicians that help callers navigate the internet, telehealth calls, and online access to food, rental assistance, and socio-emotional supports. Multi-lingual technical support services play a crucial role in ensuring that everyone has access to a vital service that will help with navigating the complexities of acquiring internet services and fixing malfunctioning digital devices. Acquiring internet services often involves technical procedures, such as setting up routers, troubleshooting connectivity issues, or understand different subscription plans. Multi-lingual tech support services are needed to guide individuals through these technical processes, ensuring that language barriers do not impede their ability to set up and enjoy internet services effectively.

Not being able to communicate with technical support services can lead to frustration, confusion, and ultimately hinder peoples' ability to enjoy the benefits of being connected to the online world. Multi-lingual tech support services aim to bridge this gap by providing assistance and guidance in a variety of languages. Individuals with language barriers can then articulate their needs, understand the available options, and make informed decisions. As a participant shared, "Some families come to the library and speak languages that are rare. It took months to get internet service for a family because they didn't understand text messages from the service providers." This is a direct example of how a lack of multi-lingual technical support services and application information from ISPs acts as a serious barrier for individuals with low English proficiency.

> "My bill increased from $100 to $175 without me knowing because my contract had expired. I didn't know how to fix it or fight it because my English isn't that good."
>
> –Aberdeen focus group participants

3.2.2.5 Individuals with disabilities

Individuals with disabilities make up 13% of the population within Washington state. The U.S. Census Bureau defined disabilities as individuals that have difficulty with hearing, vision, cognition, and ambulation.[215] However, the 2012 report from the National Disability Rights Network stated that due to accessibility challenges, the disability community is undercounted and misrepresented in the census.[216] National Disability Rights further states that that questions related to disabilities such as chronic health and psychiatric disabilities that impact more than 43% of individuals in the U.S., are not asked by the census, thus not capturing the true number of Americans living with disabilities.[217]

[215] U.S. Census Bureau, Disability Status. Accessed at: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/note/US/DIS010219
[216] National Disability Rights Network (2021), Count Everyone, Include Everyone. Accessed at: https://www.ndrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NDRN_Count_Everyone_Include_Everyone_2021.pdf
[217] National Disability Rights Network (2021), Count Everyone, Include Everyone. Accessed at: https://www.ndrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NDRN_Count_Everyone_Include_Everyone_2021.pdf

Table 24: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of Disabled Population

County	% Disabled Population
Ferry	26.8
Pacific	24.7
Columbia	24.3
Wahkiakum	23.2
Cowlitz	20.9

NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

People living with disabilities have unique challenges to accessing the internet including website and device accessibility, ability to afford services, digital skills, or complex systems and languages. Specific disabilities may require special resources to access the internet, for example, individuals with vision impairment may need screen readers or audio support to receive the information on a screen. However, screen readers may not be available on devices such as cell phones, or websites with photos without descriptive captions.

Individuals with disabilities may also need additional support to feel comfortable using technology and building their digital skills. While support is often available at libraries or other community anchor institutions, staff need to ensure they have resources and skill available to assist the specific needs of people with disabilities. This could include hardware such as computers and keyboards with large font, and software like text readers and screen dimmers.[218]

> "I had to go to the doctor yesterday. They were asking a lot of personal questions during check-in at the hospital. So, I told them, 'This device has a voice.' They said, 'No but let me check.' It was an iPad. I said, 'Siri: turn on the voiceover.' Then I was able to do all the questions by myself. Technology is changing and if it's going to benefit us [then we'll] always have to educate. When you educate someone, you get a lot of things done."
>
> –Seattle focus group participant

During a focus group held to engage with individuals with a disability, one participant expressed, "As a visually impaired, when [the internet] doesn't work you have to know the problem and even if you know, it's tough. Customer service reps ask if there are green lights, red lights, yellow lights, if they are blinking or not. We can't see them."

[218] Screen dimmers are useful for populations that suffer from seizers and can be induced from bright or flashing websites.

NEED FOR ISPS TO INCLUDE ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR THEIR CUSTOMERS

While some ISPs provide programs or resources for their customers with disabilities, including different bill formats, hearing aid-compatible cell phones, and Text Telephones or Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf directory listings, customer service providers are not consistently knowledgeable about these resources nor sensitive to a customer's disability.[219] There is a need to standardize tools and resources for ISPs that can assist customers with disabilities with troubleshooting internet connection issues or with accessing customer service information.

NEED FOR AFFORDABLE, SUBSIDIZED, OR INSURANCE-COVERED ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Assistive technology (AT) includes products, equipment, and systems that assist people with disabilities in accessing computers and other information technologies. This form of technology also enhances learning, working, and daily living for people with disabilities. AT can be low-tech, such as communication boards, and high-tech, such as special-purpose computers, screen readers and communication programs, special switched, keyboards, or applications that can act as the eyes and ears for individuals with disabilities.

> "But to live, you need those services [assistive technology]. For those who are low income and need support, they can't get them."
>
> —Seattle focus group participant

The cost of high-tech assistive technologies can often act as a barrier for individuals with disabilities tying to fulling engage with the digital world. While the state of Washington already has state programs and funds available to assist individuals with disabilities with acquiring AT, there remains a need for these resources to be appropriately allocated to those most in need. As an example, The Washington state Department of Social and Health Services offer three assistive technology and assessment practitioners—which help with assessing the needs of individuals with disabilities attempting to achieve their employment goals by merging AT and vocational rehabilitation training—in their respective region of Eastern Washington, Northwest Washington, and Southwest Washington.[220] The University of Washington additionally houses the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program, which provides resources and services to individuals with disabilities seeking AT, including lending programs.[221] Disability Rights Washington and the Department of Services for the Blind also act as a resource for individuals with disabilities by providing a list of external links that can direct a person to avenues of funding and programs that can bring the power of AT to someone's residence.[222] Nevertheless, there continues to be a digital divide between able-bodied individuals and those with a disability. For long-term digital inclusion, every person with a disability should have access to affordable AT.

[219] CenturyLink, Programs for customer with disabilities. Accessed at: https://www.centurylink.com/aboutus/community/community-development/programs-for-customers-with-disabilities.htm |
[220] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Assistive Technology Services. Accessed at: Assistive Technology Services | DSHS (wa.gov)
[221] Washington Assistive Technology Act Programs (2023), Technology for Independence. Accessed at: https://watap.org/
[222] Disability Rights Washington (2018), Accessibility & Assistive Technology. Accessed at: https://www.disabilityrightswa.org/resources/resource-category/accessibility-and-at/

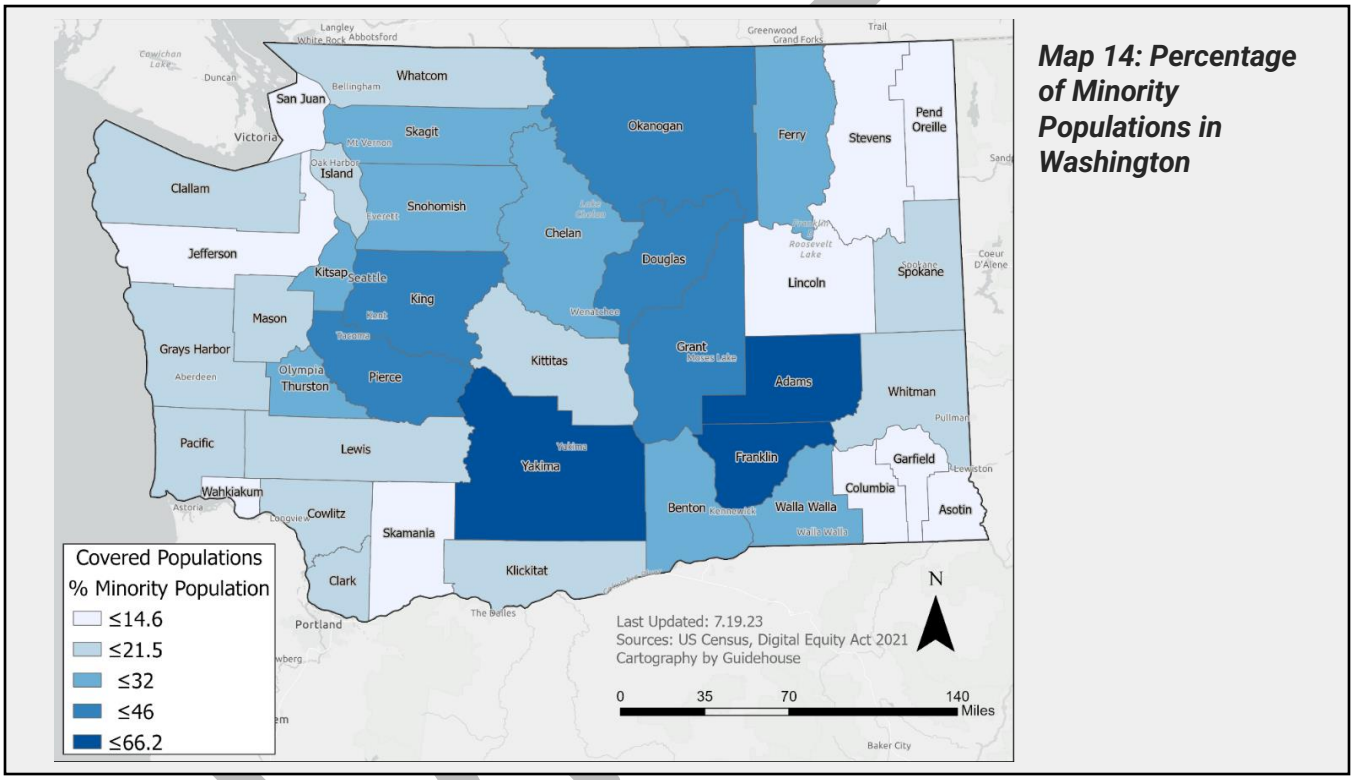
NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE INTERNET SERVICES TO POWER ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Individuals with disabilities additionally rely extensively on internet connection in order to power the devices they do use as AT. For those who are also low-income, affordability programs cannot serve them due to slow internet speeds or network congestion causing lags and buffering. For example, a participant expressed during a focus group with the disabled community, "Sometimes when they design the affordability programs, it does not serve me. It's very slow, a lot of lag." Individuals with disabilities often rely on AT to do basic, everyday tasks such as reading, writing, and listening. Many tools require to be connected, including braille devices. As a participant expressed during a focus group, "We use iPhones to connect and do most of the things. [We need] higher-end phones for proper accessibility. We use computers but we have to use magnifiers or other tools that need faster connectivity." There is a substantial need for this community to have both reliable and affordable options for internet services for them to engage with the digital world and accomplish daily tasks.

> "I've tried low-cost programs. For about 24 hours. They were too slow."
>
> —Seattle focus group participant

3.2.2.6 Racial and ethnic minorities

Racial and ethnic minorities span many of the other listed covered populations. In Washington state, 33% of residents identify as a racial or ethnic minority. **Map 14** showcases concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities across the state, while **Table 25** showcases the percentage. It is important to note that while grouping racial and ethnic minority for analysis, this group is extremely diverse and has unique needs that are largely driven by systemic barriers. For example, the needs of migrant workers and the ability to seek out support for digital resources and skills training may be impacted by fear of deportation addition to potential language barriers. The needs below are not exhaustive nor specific to the experiences of various racial and ethnic groups.



Map 14: Percentage of Minority Populations in Washington

Table 25: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of Minorities

County	% Minority Population
Adams	66.2
Franklin	59.6
Yakima	56.8
Grant	46
King	40.4

NEED FOR CULTURALLY SENSITIVE ONLINE FORMS

> "Government websites don't recognize my last name, because it's pretty long. I often have to shorten it then remember which version of my last name I used when trying to log back in."
>
> *– Burien focus group participants*

Although other covered populations include racial and ethnic minorities, some racial and ethnic groups have nuanced needs that differ from the other represented populations. Specifically, language barriers may prevent individuals from navigating government websites due to complex language or a lack of translation options. Similarly, some racial and ethnic minorities may have difficulties using government websites due to the spelling of their name. For example, there are more than 150,000 Chinese Americans in Washington state with Li being one of the most common surnames. Yet, for some government forms, the last name Li would not be recognized due to the insufficient characters, as the form defaults to traditional American last names that usually feature more characters.[223] Additionally, first or last names with hyphens or other symbols are also rejected which can lead to Washingtonians needing to "Americanizing" their names in order to fill out information online. Being able to enter your name without having to modify it for computer systems promotes digital inclusion and can also reduce barriers to accessing services.

NEED TO WORK WITH NONTRADITIONAL COMMUNITY ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS FOR OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Nontraditional CAIs offer opportunities to meet diverse communities where they feel comfortable and frequently visit. As one example, during the era of American slavery, enslaved individuals were allowed to work in barbershops, providing haircuts to affluent customers. Today, barbershops are recognized as cultural centers within the Black community, serving as spaces to share information, host events, and showcase elected officials, with some barbershops serving as food distribution centers during COVID-19.[224] Due to their connection and central locations within many communities, barbershops could serve as public Wi-Fi network, digital training locations, or locations where public engagement events are hosted and information is shared, such as how to sign up for discount programs like ACP, offering communities opportunities to stay connected.

Similarly, across the United States, many racial and ethnic minorities are religious, with high percentages of Black (83%), Latino (74%), Asian (68%) population attending a religious service at least a few times a year, as compared to their white (66%) counterparts.[225] Some faith-based institutions run nonprofits and assist with food distribution, clothing drives, or homework help for kids within the community. Faith-based institutions are well connected, with space and resources to share information, create safe and comfortable spaces for digital skills and digital literacy trainings.

[223] Wall Street Journal (2021), What can't the internet Handle in 2021? Apostrophes. Access at: https://www.wsj.com/articles/internet-mangles-names-accents-web-forms-11664462695

[224] Library of Congress Blogs (2022), Honoring African Americans: Barbering. Accessed in: https://blogs.loc.gov/inside_adams/2022/02/african-americans-barbering/

[225] Pew Research Center, Racial and Ethnic Composition. Accessed at: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/

NEED FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT COMMUNITIES

Government agencies need to invest resources into meaningfully engaging with tribal government and residents. Some tribes in Washington, such as the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, have been faced with losing federal recognition, hunting and fishing rights, and rights to their land, resulting in negative impacts to the tribal community's health care and education.[226] Colonialism is a barrier for tribal communities to access economic opportunities and resources that affect their quality of life, such as more job opportunities to address high unemployment rates .[227] To combat the history of government mistrust, relationship building is essential to ensuring that everyone feels that their contributions are valued and empowered to participate in public engagement

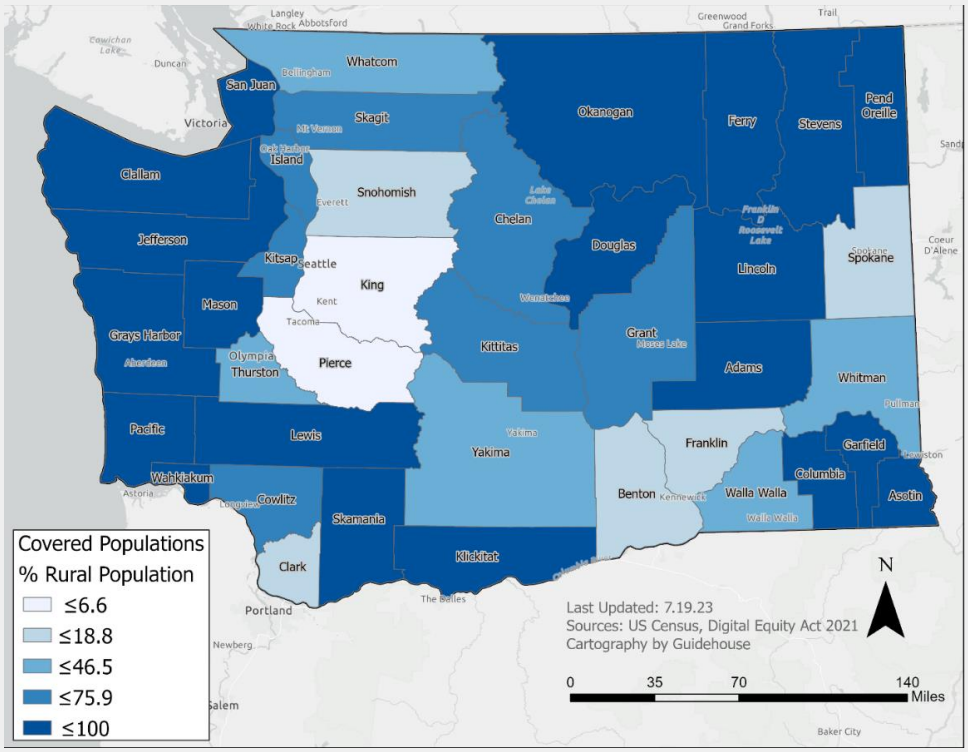
During the tribal listening sessions hosted by the WSBO, many tribes expressed frustration for being left out of the planning process. Some members proposed creating coalitions where tribes can work with state and federal government to advocate for their needs. This also includes creating coalitions with neighboring counties to share resources and information. Tribes such as The Hoh in western Washington are near multiple counties where relationships could be cultivated to assist with expanding digital equity resources. Oher tribes want to ensure that the government understands both difference and similarities of the 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington and can create a unique strategy to engage in government-to-government partnerships that respect tribal sovereignty. Establishing partnerships takes work and communication, and many tribes are willing to engage with the state to provide their community with the resources they need. The WSBO has an opportunity to listen and co- create to ensure that all Washingtonians can participate in the digital society.

[226] Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Jamestown_S_Klallam_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box

[227] United Nations, Fight Racism. Accessed at: https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/indigenous-peoples

3.2.2.7 Rural inhabitants

Currently, an estimated 19% of the population in Washington live in a rural area.[228] **Map 15** reflects the percentage of each county's population living in rural areas.



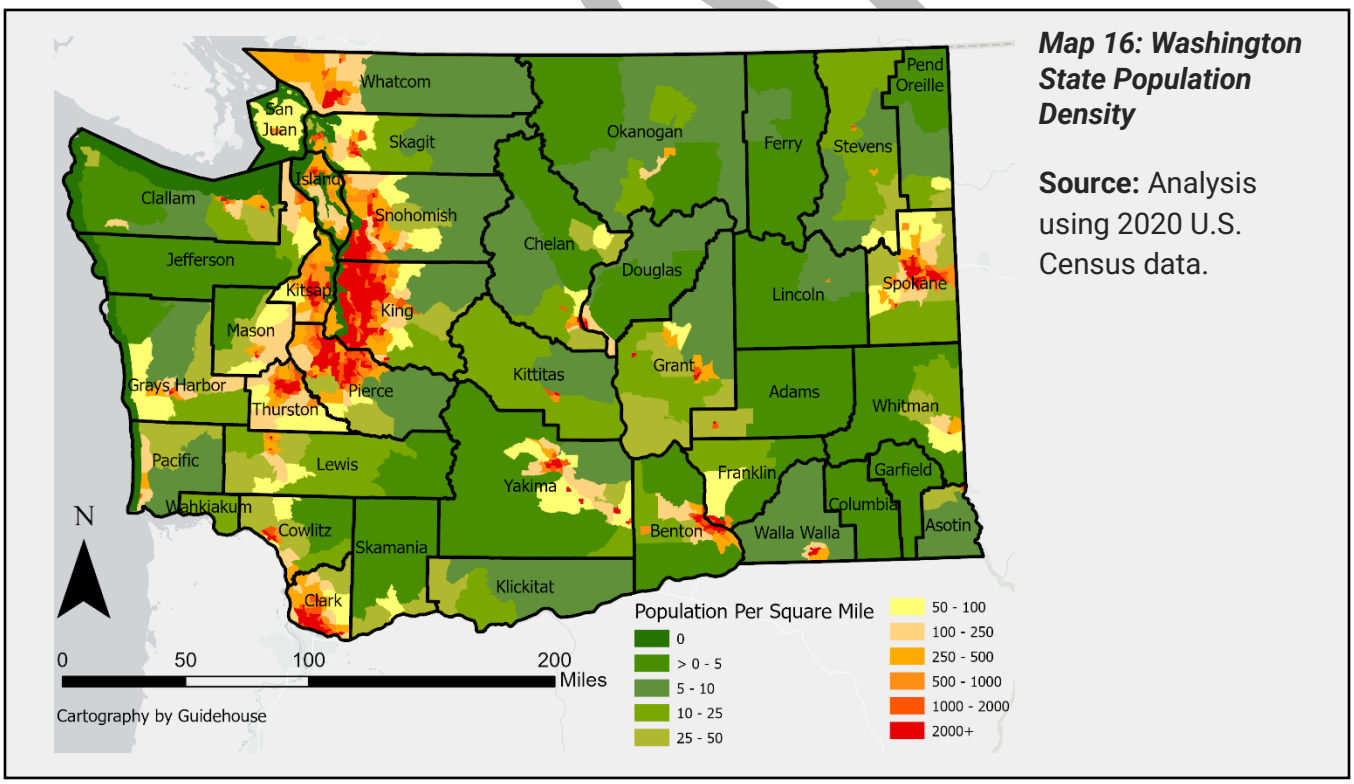
Map 15: Percentage of Rural Population by County

[228] Note this estimate uses the U.S. Census Bureau definition based on population density since it is more consistent with the state definition, whereas the DE NOFO uses a definition based on number of inhabitants within a defined metropolitan area.

Rural areas in Washington have low population densities as shown in **Table 26** with seven of 39 counties having population densities below ten people per square mile, which can make it economically challenging for private ISPs to invest in broadband infrastructure. As demonstrated in **Map 16**, high population densities are clustered around the I-5 corridor in western Washington, Yakima in central Washington, and Spokane in eastern Washington. Challenging terrain may also pose a barrier to accessing high-speed internet. Mountains, forests, rivers, or large distances between households can make it difficult to deploy traditional broadband infrastructure, increasing the cost and complexity of expanding services.

Table 26: Counties with Population Densities Below Ten People Per Square Mile

County	Population density (People/Mile^2)
Garfield	3.24
Ferry	3.31
Columbia	4.55
Lincoln	4.81
Skamania	7.24
Okanogan	8.17
Pend Oreille	9.80



Map 16: Washington State Population Density

Source: Analysis using 2020 U.S. Census data.

Additionally, the lack of market competition often contributes to limited broadband options and higher costs for residents. ISPs may have little incentive to invest in infrastructure upgrades or to extend their services to underserved areas due to a lack of sufficient competition. As a result, many rural communities are underserved or unserved. Local governments, Public Utility Districts, Port Authorities, and municipalities can play a vital role by encouraging competition and facilitating partnerships to expand services in rural areas.

NEED TO CONSIDER RURAL SPECIFIC BROADBAND NEEDS

Local municipalities must consider needs that may be more specific to rural areas for planning for and administering broadband expansion projects as well as digital equity programs. Currently, local municipalities often center municipal boundaries as the areas to expand internet access or to deploy digital equity programs because of the higher population density in those areas. However, expanding broadband access beyond city limits and including rural areas can bring significant benefits to rural inhabitants since internet has become essential for various aspects of daily life, including education, healthcare, business, and communication. A participant in the listening session in the city of Forks emphasized the need to consider areas outside of city limits, bringing to our attention that, "The population within Fork's city limits is less than the population outside."

"Stuff like [smart agriculture] is really changing the way rural communities are developing, and how we access the internet right now is probably the largest bottleneck we have."

– Spokane listening session participant

The need to consider areas outside of city limits also expands Washington's potential for economic development by no longer relying on city hubs to be the sole attractor for businesses and industries. Reliable broadband infrastructure outside of city limits will be crucial for attracting skilled laborers and businesses, as it creates an environment conducive to economic growth. It enables local businesses to expand their reach, attract remote workers, and access markets outside of their immediate vicinity. This will then, in turn, stimulate job creation, increase income levels, and boost overall economy of the rural region. As a participant mentioned during the Oak Harbor listening session, "there's a real chance of it impacting the potential to increase property value."

"Everything comes over the internet and so much relies on it: jobs, education, health, commerce…,"

– Okanogan listening session participant

Education opportunities, healthcare services, agricultural innovation, and social connectivity would also be positively impacted in rural communities through the expansion of broadband in areas outside of city limits:

- Education: Students in rural areas can access online learning resources, participate in virtual classrooms, and engage in distance education programs which would ensure that they have the same educational opportunities as their urban counterparts.
- Healthcare services: Broadband connectivity also expands the delivery of telehealth services, which can be particularly vital in areas where medical resources are scarce or distant. Remote consultation, monitoring of health conditions, and sharing of medical records with medical professions can lead to improved access to quality healthcare and better health outcomes for rural inhabitants.
- Agricultural innovation: Technological advances could also be brought to the agricultural industry, such as precision farming, remote monitoring, and data-driven decision-making for small farmers in rural Washington. Farmers can access real-time weather data, market information, and agricultural research which in turn increases productivity, reduces cost, and may promote sustainable practices.
- Social connectivity: Internet access can help rural inhabitants stay closer connected with friends and family by allowing them to access online social platforms and to participate in virtual communities or video calls. More social interaction with loved ones may reduce social isolation, improve mental well-being, and can provide opportunities for cultural exchange, civic engagement, and community-building.

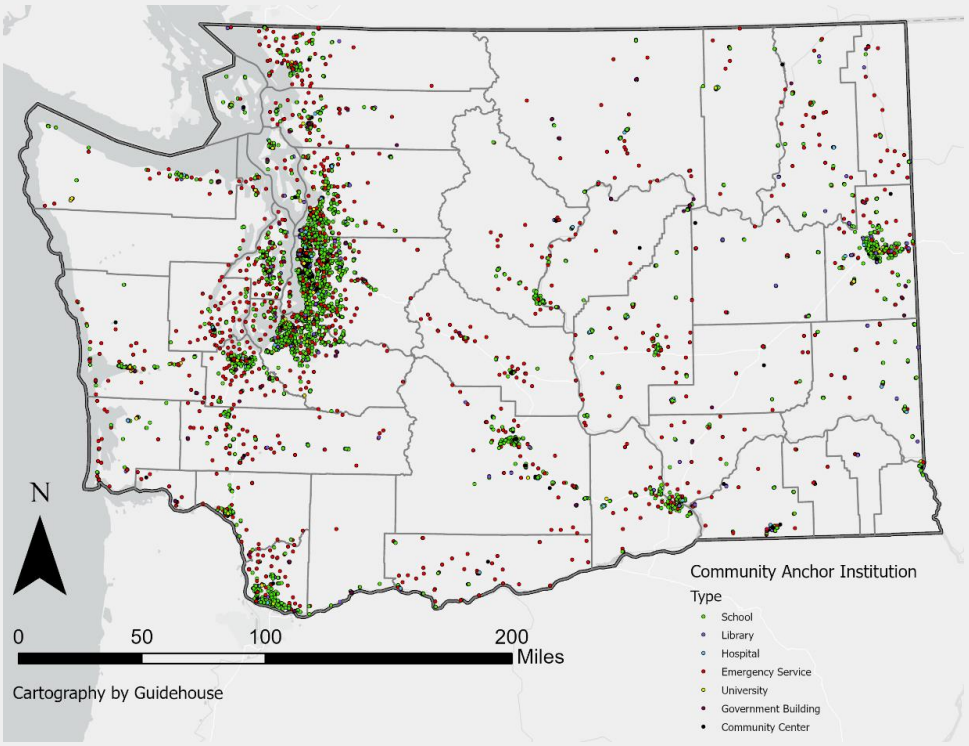
Considering areas outside of city limits when planning and administering broadband expansion projects is crucial for the well-being and progress of rural inhabitants. By bridging the digital divide, fostering economic development, improving education and healthcare, encouraging agricultural innovation, and enhancing social connectivity, municipalities can ensure that rural areas are not left behind in the digital age, creating a more equitable and inclusive society. As mentioned by an individual participating in a listening session in Spokane, “Stuff like [smart agriculture] is really changing the way rural communities are developing, and how we access the internet right now is probably the largest bottleneck we have." Considering areas outside of city limits allows for focused planning and innovative solutions that may address the unique geography and challenges of rural Washington.

> “I can’t fulfill work responsibilities at home and other creative opportunities because the bandwidth is not great, and it’s unable to upload,”
>
> *– Asotin listening session participant*

NEED FOR MORE MOBILE CONNECTED SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS

Rural inhabitants need easy access to free public Wi-Fi and digital inclusion assets such as skills training, device lending programs, and digital navigation assistance. In densely populated areas around the state, many individuals and families have access to community anchor institutions that can offer both. However, due to the nature of rural areas being sparsely populated and with stretches of uninhabited land, it is difficult to ensure easily accessible community anchor institutions for each household. During the WSBO's public engagement period, a participant in the Forks listening session emphasized the importance and usefulness of their Book Mobile hotspots, a large mobile vehicle sponsored by the libraries that offers free hotspot connectivity. There are, "no free internet [locations] in remote areas," with no places like, "a Starbucks or McDonalds," as a participant in the Forks listening session stated, making innovative solutions such a mobile connected services a need for rural inhabitants.

Currently, CAIs in Washington are geographically distributed mostly around urban areas, heavily surrounding the Seattle-Tacoma area as well as the Spokane area, as shown in **Map 17.**



Map 17: Community Anchor Institutions in Washington

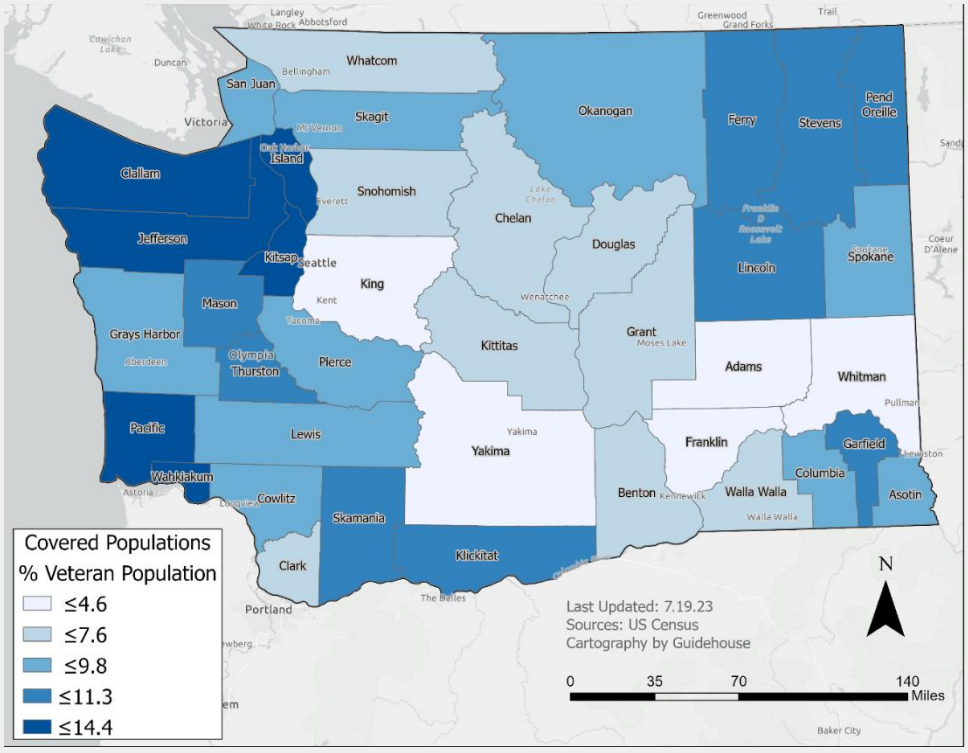
Source: *BEAD Five-Year Action Plan*

Rural inhabitants have limited or inadequate internet infrastructure, making it difficult to access high-speed internet. Furthermore, rural areas in Washington can be very vast with limited transportation options, making community resources like libraries and community centers difficult to reach. Without free public Wi-Fi being offered at local community anchor institutions, rural inhabitants have an additional barrier to accessing internet compared to their urban counterparts. Community anchor institutions notably may serve as lifelines by providing individuals with internet connectivity, access to educational resources, job portals, government services, and other essential online platforms; therefore, their absence in rural Washington further exacerbated the digital divide and hinders opportunities for rural inhabitants. An expansion of mobile connected services in these locations with dedicated, recurring funding in state and local government budgets can potentially help bridge financial gaps and ensure their sustained availability in the community. Some areas of the state of Washington have successfully implemented the concept of mobile library services and mobile hotspots, such as in the city of Seattle,[229] North Central Washington,[230] Whatcom County,[231] Snohomish and Island County,[232] as well as Spokane County.[233] These successful programs can be expanded to serve rural areas of Washington consistently and sustainably.

[229] The Seattle Public Library, Mobile Library Services. Accessed at: https://www.spl.org/programs-and-services/outreach/mobile-library-services
[230] NCW Libraries, The Bookmobiles. Accessed at: https://www.ncwlibraries.org/bookmobiles/
[231] Whatcom County Library System, Bookmobile & Mobile Services. Accessed at: https://www.wcls.org/bookmobile-mobile-services/
[232] Sno-isle Library, Library on Wheels. Accessed at: https://www.sno-isle.org/library-on-wheels/
[233] Spokane Library, Mobile & Homebound Service. Accessed at: https://www.spokanelibrary.org/mobile-and-homebound

3.2.2.8 Veterans

There are 523,000 veterans in Washington state, according to data from the U.S. Census. Veterans are mostly concentrated in western Washington as displayed in **Map 18** and **Table 27**. Veterans like many of the other covered populations have overlapping identifies with many other covered populations like low-income, rural, aging and people living with disabilities. For example, in Washington there are 217,000 veterans 65 and older with 11,000 veterans living below the federal poverty level. Of the 11,000 below the poverty level, 48% have a disability. For veterans, compounding identities result in complex and unique needs that can exacerbate the digital divide.



Map 18: Percentage of Veterans in Washington State

Source: U.S. Census 2020

Table 27: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of Veterans

County	% Veteran Population
Island	14.4
Kitsap	12.4
Wahkiakum	12.2
Jefferson	12.1
Clallam	11.9

NEED FOR DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING, PARTICULARLY FOR RECENTLY SEPARATED VETERANS

Like many other covered populations, veterans need digital skills training to participate in today's digital society. Veterans have an unemployment rate of 2.7%, with young veterans, ages 18-24, unemployment rate at 6.5%.[234] Studies show that young veterans struggle with unemployment due to proximity to their service, meaning that they recently served (recently separated veterans) and are having difficulties adjusting to the civilian workforce. Ensuring veterans have digital skills, is essential to support their integration into civilian work. Today's workforce requires the ability to operate technology, not just to apply for a position but in the day-to-day work on a job, which may differ from the work veterans are accustomed to.

NEED FOR SYSTEM AND DEVICE SUPPORT FOR VA PROGRAMS

During COVID-19, many programs and resources were moved online with the intention of keeping vulnerable populations safe and reducing the spread of the coronavirus. Today many of those resources are still online, yet communities like veterans struggle with the complicated system, preferring the previous in-person method for accessing benefits through agencies like the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA).

> "The VA has gotten more and more online to make it more easy for veterans, but you get to a certain generation. Double authentications become a difficulty."
>
> -White Salmon participant

To combat this, programs, such as the digital navigator program operated by the Washington State Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA), teach veterans digital skills to access their benefits, healthcare, and other government services online.[235] These programs provide participants with a laptop, smart phone, or hotspot, as well as training to use the devices to ensure veterans have the tools and support they need to access systems. Unfortunately, DVA's digital navigator program can only support up to 4,000 participants, a fraction of the veterans that need assistance. Expanding programs like digital navigators and other community-based programming can support veterans through complicated government systems ensuring that they receive the benefits they need.

[234] Syracuse University (2023), The Employment Situation of Veterans. Accessed at: https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/IVMF-Employment-Situation-of-Veterans-June-released-July-2023.pdf

[235] Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, Digital Navigator Program. Accessed at: https://www.dva.wa.gov/veterans-service-members-and-their-families/digital-navigator-program

OTHER UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

3.2.2.9 Youth in foster care

Youth in foster care are a particularly underserved and vulnerable population, facing numerous challenges that can hinder their well-being and future prospects. These children are in the temporary customer of the state, specifically the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

There are 10,060 children in foster care in Washington; 2,167 of these children are waiting for adoptive families, as shared by a DCYF program manager during an informant interview. Some are in group homes; others are cared for by foster families. The child welfare system in Washington struggles to recruit and retain foster parents.[236] There is also a shortage of licensed group homes and foster homes, resulting in overcrowded group care and frequent placement changes.[237] State agencies are therefore increasing the practice of housing children and youth in hotel rooms.[238] Washington state recorded over 4,000 hotel stays in 2022 for children and youth under the age of 18.[239] There has been a 468% increase in hotel stays for youth in foster care since 2017, as recorded by the Washington State Office of Family and Children's Ombud.[240] The instability of these environments can disrupt educational continuity, exacerbate emotional trauma, and hinder the development of meaningful relationship with caregivers. Studies show that congregate care causes harm to youth, reducing timely placements and increasing chances of incarceration.

> "If we can't get in touch with our young people, we can't do our work."
>
> – Independent Living Provider for Youth in Foster Care

Youth in foster care are protected both federally and in Washington state to ensure that their basic needs are met, including their educational, physical, and emotional needs. The Independent Living Program run by the DCYF for foster youth is an example of a government service that the state offers for youth in foster care. The program is federally required to provide academic support, career preparation support, employment support, healthy relationships coaching, health and risk prevention coaching, home management support, post-secondary education support, and tangible items that would help children become more independent for things like a computer if funding is available. However, youth in foster care may lack the necessary digital skills to safely navigate information online, devices, and consistent access to the internet that are crucial for success in education, employment, and daily life. This digital divide places them at a further disadvantage. The needs delineated below have mostly been identified through informant interviews with program managers at the DCYF.

[236] US Department of Education, Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Foster Care. Accessed at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795825.pdf.
[237] Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombud (2018), New report sounds alarm over state of Washington's foster care system. Accessed at: https://ofco.wa.gov/new-report-sounds-alarm-over-state-washingtons-foster-care-system.
[238] Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombud (2019), Hotel Stays Put Pressure on Washington Lawmakers to Increase Foster Care Funding. Accessed at: https://ofco.wa.gov/hotel-stays-put-pressure-washington-lawmakers-increase-foster-care-funding.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid.

NEED FOR ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES FOR FOSTER CARE MANAGEMENT SERVICES TO ENSURE THAT YOUTH HAVE THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO ACCESS THE INTERNET

Foster care management services, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were required to meet youth in foster care in-person in order to conduct check-ins, administer resources, and provide assistance and support for their educational, physical, and emotional needs. However, during the pandemic, these requirements were lifted and instead the DCYF conducted their check-ins and adjacent services virtually, including court hearings, online schooling, and enrollment into government programs for benefits and financial aid. During this time, the state agency got a clearer understanding of the digital needs youth in foster care had—particularly gaps in internet access and digital devices.

Foster care case managers assist foster children with getting connected to the internet, by providing options on how to access free public Wi-Fi, such as going to a Taco Bell or the local library, and how to travel to these spots using publicly available resources. However, this could be on a case-by-case basis as it is not included as a standard part of case management. The resources that are available, as noted by Independent Living Providers for youth in foster care, are, "incredibly outdated, especially for technology—from the 1990s, even." Each situation also is unique depending on the age group of children, since some case managers need to assist elementary-aged children while others serve adolescents to young adults. Now after the pandemic, the DCYF has noted there is still a definitive need to ensure that children have the tools and resources required to tap into things like online schooling resources and online enrollment applications, as well as gaming and social connectivity.[241] Ensuring that DCFY staff and other foster care practitioners are aware of concrete ways to assist youth with getting connected would help mitigate issues that come from a lack of stable internet connectivity.

There is also a need for resources that are 'youth friendly,' as mentioned during an informant interview with a program manager at DCYF. While children are generally tech savvy given that they have grown up with smartphones and computers, they may struggle with understanding "adult" or legal language that is used to access resources, update them on court information, provide instructions, etc. Plain and 'youth friendly' language when creating guidance and resource tools that youth in foster care can help keep them engaged with through their care management services and providing information in different platforms such as videos or through social media may also be more effective than print resources.[242]

NEED FOR ADDITIONAL DEVICE LENDING PROGRAMS OUTSIDE OF K-12 PROGRAMS

Another need that was identified for youth in foster care is the need for additional device lending programs for school-aged children outside of K-12 programs. Currently, there are two main computer lending programs for youth in Washington: the Computer 4 Kids (C4K) program administered by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Computer for Learning program administered by the U.S. General Services Administration. The C4K program

[241] Interview with program manager at DCYF on July 7, 2023
[242] Adolescent Health Initiative (2017), Engaging Youth on social media. Accessed at: https://umhs-adolescenthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/social-media-plan-starter-guide.pdf

makes it possible to request and to donate state-owned, surplus computers and computer-related equipment to any public school district or educational service district in Washington state. By law, only public-school districts in Washington state are eligible for equipment sourced through C4K. Computer for Learning (CFL) is a federally administered program that provides schools and educational across the country with computer equipment for classroom learning. The CFL program allows eligible organizations to view and select the computer equipment that federal agencies have reported as surplus, which then are sent to their locations.

However, as mentioned by a program manager at the DCYF, there are youth in foster care that are no longer enrolled in schooling or that have completed their K-12 education. These children have found it difficult to acquire a device through lending programs, since the majority of the most easily accessible programs are administered through schools. Therefore, there is a need for lending programs specifically for minors through avenues besides schools.

NEED FOR DIGITAL NAVIGATION SUPPORT FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Foster families are a critical component to caring for the youth that are under the temporary custody of the State. To become a foster parent, the state requires a home study, extensive interviews with family members, a background check, and pre-service training. These required training courses include a Caregiver Core training course, a First Aid/CPR training course, and a Blood Borne Pathogens course. Foster parents also get free, high-quality access to many training courses through the Alliance and support services through The Alliance Caregiver Retention, Education, and Support (CaRES) program.

The CaRES program has a course for Parenting During the Digital Age, however it is not a requirement and foster families must individually seek out the resource and self-enroll. Currently, there is no statewide support for digital navigation for foster families. Conversations with staff at the DCYF indicate that foster homes may not have internet access for the children under their care and lack the awareness or resources for acquiring subsidized packages from ISPs or the ACP program. The DCYF has observed a lack of knowledge or motivation to acquire internet services. There is a need for digital navigation tailored specifically to foster parents, including assistance with enrolling in the ACP program and other subsidy programs for internet services.

3.2.2.10 Individuals experiencing housing instability

More than 25,000 individuals are experiencing housing instability in Washington state.[243] Populations are considered to be experiencing housing instability if they are unsheltered, in temporary shelter, or in their vehicle. According to a report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Washington state's population experiencing housing instability has increased by 10% from 2020 to 2022, with the largest population growth happening in Seattle.

The population experiencing housing instability intersects with other covered populations including low-income, veterans, foster care youth, and aging populations. For example, in the U.S 31-46% of youth exiting foster care experience housing instability.[244] However, there are many more people, and intersecting communities experiencing housing instability as the population is severely undercounted.[245] Many agencies use a point-in-time count, which would be conducted on a single night and not adequately represent the population. While these numbers are important to understanding the baseline in Washington state, there are far more people experiencing housing instability than the data shows.

NEED FOR MORE PUBLIC WI-FI LOCATIONS

Many of the covered populations that were engaged for the creation of this plan spoke to their reliance on cell phones as their primary device for connecting to the internet. Programs like Lifeline offer cell phones to low-income communities, but limited minutes keep the most vulnerable populations from connecting to broadband. One participant in Lynnwood that identified as having unstable housing, said how valuable public Wi-Fi locations are for accessing the internet. Locations like coffee shops, grocery stores, and libraries offer Wi-Fi that the community can use, but these locations often turn off their public access when the businesses are closed. For those experiencing housing instability, resources and access to the internet are needed, even after regular business hours.

> "I sleep in the parking lot…and when the Wi-Fi goes off, I can't use my phone. That's usually how I know the soup kitchens that are open for the night."
>
> *– Lynnwood focus group participant*

As mentioned in earlier sections, access to public Wi-Fi networks is essential for the most vulnerable population to access resources in an increasingly digital society. Critical functions such as job searches and applications are increasingly moving online as more companies are going paperless. For people experiencing housing instability and without a mailbox, information related to government services, and community resources is mostly made available and accessible online. To help address these needs, more all hours available public Wi-Fi locations are critical to supplying services that meet populations in need where they are.

[243] The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, (2022), The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress. Accessed at: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf
[244] American Public Health Association (2013), Homelessness During the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood. Accessed at: https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301455
[245] The Seattle Times (2023), WA's homeless population is increasing, new HUD report shows. Accessed at: https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/was-homeless-population-is-increasing-new-hud-report-shows/

4. COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS & PARTNERSHIP WITH TRIBES

4.1 *PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS*

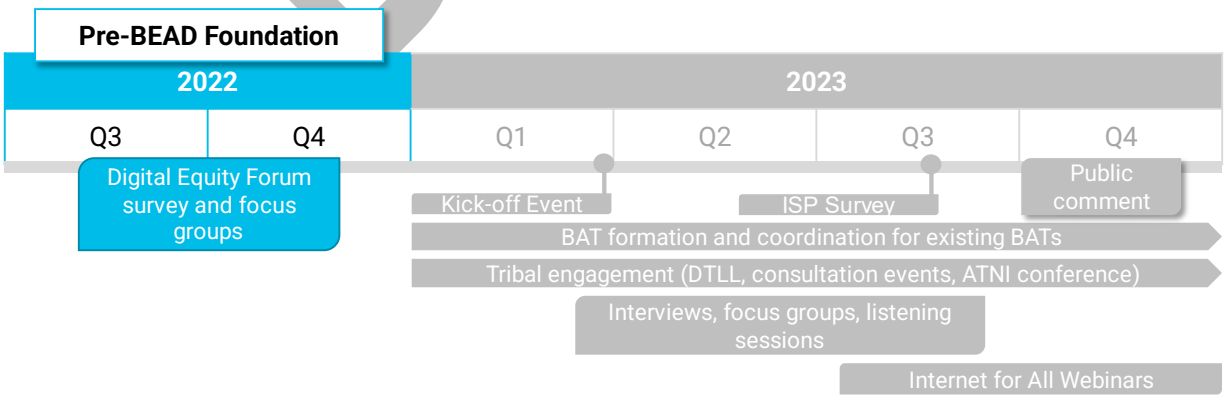
The vision of the state's Digital Equity Plan is only accomplished through centering the voices of individuals from covered populations and working with communities to eliminate barriers to connection. The state's commitment to ongoing partnerships and stakeholder engagement is critical for creating a strong foundation to successfully provide affordable broadband and the skills to utilize the services to unserved and underserved locations. The state of Washington has already connected with over 3,400 individuals from July 2022 through August 2023 through public engagement activities that combined conversations related to the BEAD and Digital Equity programs – with their feedback contributing to the development of this Digital Equity Plan – and plans to continue community outreach and engagement as an ongoing effort.

The WSBO is deeply invested in conducting meaningful engagement with community members and organizations to ensure that the overall vision, strategy, and desired outcomes at the end of the BEAD and Digital Equity programs are reflective of diverse communities across the state. To that end, the WSBO is tailoring its approach to ongoing engagement to meet the following public engagement goals:

1. Establish meaningful engagement with communities that have historically not been represented at the table, with particular attention paid to geographic coverage across the state.
2. Promote an open, inclusive, and transparent public involvement process.
3. Strengthen partnerships through multiple engagement opportunities.
4. Reduce burden or confusion for the public to engage and participate through clear information and communication.

PRE-BEAD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT – CREATING STRONG FOUNDATIONS (2022)

Figure 4: 2022 Stakeholder Engagement and Tribal Partnership Timeline



In anticipation of the planning to be conducted for the BEAD and Digital Equity processes, and prior to the period of performance for National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) planning funds, the WSBO in partnership with the Washington State Office of Equity convened the state's Digital Equity Forum to identify challenges to digital equity in the state, as **Figure 4** shows. Funded with state funds identified in the FY 22 supplemental budget, this forum conducted activities that served as an important precursor to the planning efforts funded by NTIA. These activities included:

- **Public listening sessions:** Four 90-minute public listening sessions were held with the goal of providing an accessible space to identify community needs related to digital equity and barriers to internet use in Washington state.
- **An online community survey:** Accessible in 17 languages including American Sign Language, was developed to reach Washington state residents to better understand challenges to accessing and using the internet. The survey was available for 45 days and more than 2,700 total responses were received from Washington residents.[246]
- **Focus groups:** The Equity in Education Coalition and Goodwill coordinated four in-person focus groups across the state to help give people with lived experience the opportunity to share their experiences and stories. Focus groups were held in Ephrata, Pasco, Seattle, and Tacoma Washington.

Results from the analysis of the listening sessions, online survey, and focus groups conducted in 2022 uncovered four key themes:

- **Higher quality broadband service is desired:** Faster and more reliable service needs to be available to more people at more affordable rates and from more providers.
- **Expanded access:** Expansion of broadband internet access must be coupled with culturally informed efforts and multilingual outreach to elevate digital literacy and digital skills for broader adoption to occur.
- **Quality equipment is needed:** Varied quality of internet access equipment (such as modems, Wi-Fi routers, etc.) negatively affects broadband access.
- **Active role of state government:** There is a desire to see internet service provider deficiencies addressed through effective regulation and the development of new state programs and initiatives to more effectively underserved communities.[247]

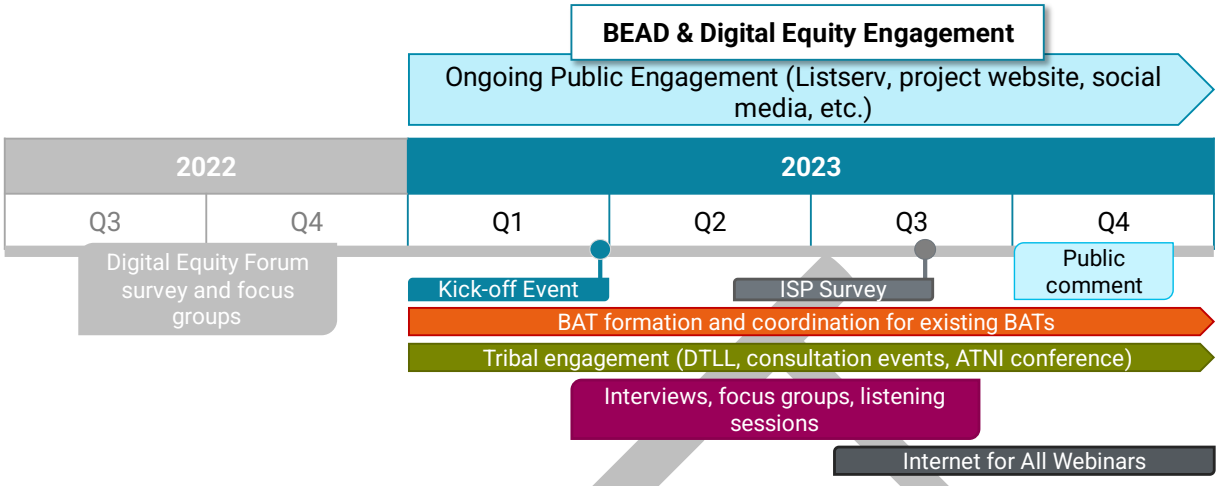
Findings from these efforts and the more than 2,700 individuals who took the time to contribute their experiences have provided the foundational early inputs for the planning and public engagement being implemented for the BEAD and Digital Equity planning process. Additional engagement activities, which were designed specifically with the BEAD and Digital Equity planning in mind are described in the next section.

[246] Washington State Department of Commerce (April 4, 2022), Digital Equity Forum Report. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=CommerceReports_2022_LGD_Digital%20Equity%20Forum_Final_4.4.23_66571f42-74cb-40e6-994f-e1e81fe78e89.pdf. Survey and focus group results found in the Appendix.

[247] Washington State Department of Commerce (April 4, 2022), Digital Equity Forum Report. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=CommerceReports_2022_LGD_Digital%20Equity%20Forum_Final_4.4.23_66571f42-74cb-40e6-994f-e1e81fe78e89.pdf.

4.1.1 Public Engagement – BEAD and Digital Equity Planning (2023 and onwards)

Figure 5: 2023 Public Engagement Timeline



As depicted in **Figure 5**, the WSBO is building from previous efforts to support ongoing public engagement by demonstrating its commitment to learn from previous engagement efforts and to continue hearing from all Washingtonians. One of the most significant efforts that the WSBO has used state funds to help develop are Broadband Action Teams (BATs): The WSBO partnered with Washington State University-Extension to help support existing and stand-up new BATs. 50 BATs across 39 counties and 11 tribes submitted broadband and/or digital equity Community Action Plans that are helping to inform this Plan and the Digital Equity Plan. In addition to the 11 tribes that submitted independent Community Action Plans, four tribes partnered with counties in developing a Community Action Plan. In total, 16 tribes participated. BATs consist of a variety of stakeholders including local and tribal government representatives, economic development councils, CAIs, and more.

Additionally, the WSBO and its partners, including the Equity in Education Coalition and the City of Seattle, conducted over 70 engagement activities throughout the state between 2022 and 2023, which have helped inform this Plan, as **Table 28** shows.

Table 28: Public Engagement Activities Contributing to Washington's Plan

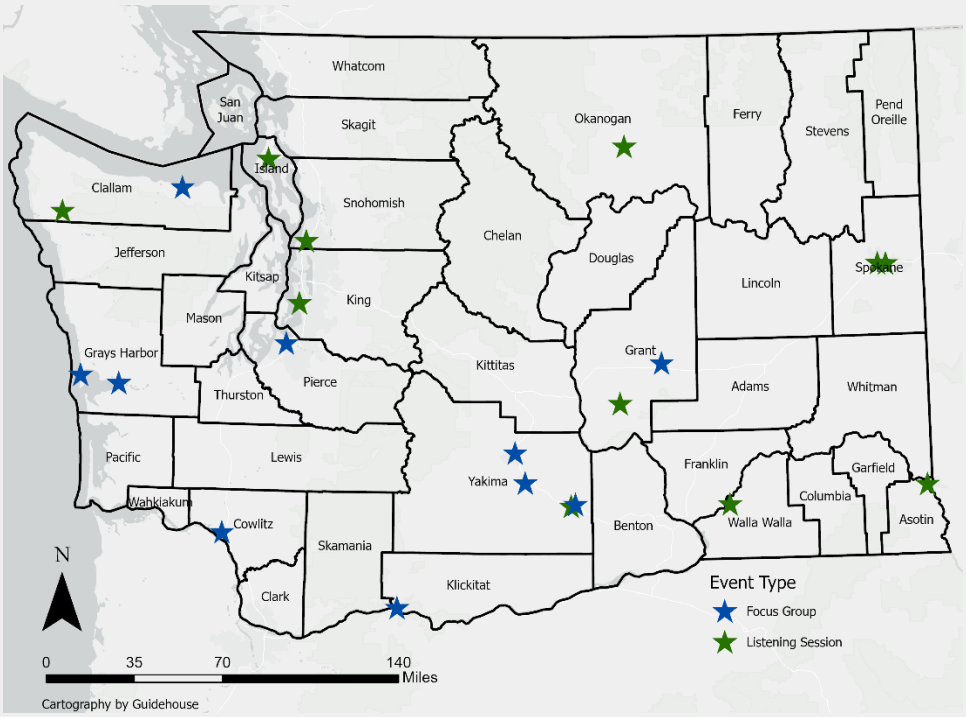
(July 2022 through August 2023)

Engagement Type (# of events)	Number of People Engaged	Covered Populations / Organizations Representing Covered Populations[248]
Interviews (22)	35	All
Focus Groups (34)	251	All
Community Events (mobile engagement) (5)	157	All except incarcerated individuals
Listening Sessions (12)	267	All
Surveys (2) *	2,745	Aging individuals, Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Total	3,455	All

*Note: The 2022 survey included age, race/ethnicity, and zip code information, but did not include information related to all underrepresented community categories as defined in the Digital Equity NOFO.

[248] "Covered Populations" describes the eight (8) population groups NTIA identified in the DE Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) which overlap with "underrepresented communities" identified in the BEAD NOFO: low-income households; aging individuals; incarcerated individuals; veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier, and individuals who are experiencing housing instability.

Map 19 shows the location of in-person engagement events conducted between May to June 2023 with focus groups depicted in blue and listening sessions depicted in green.



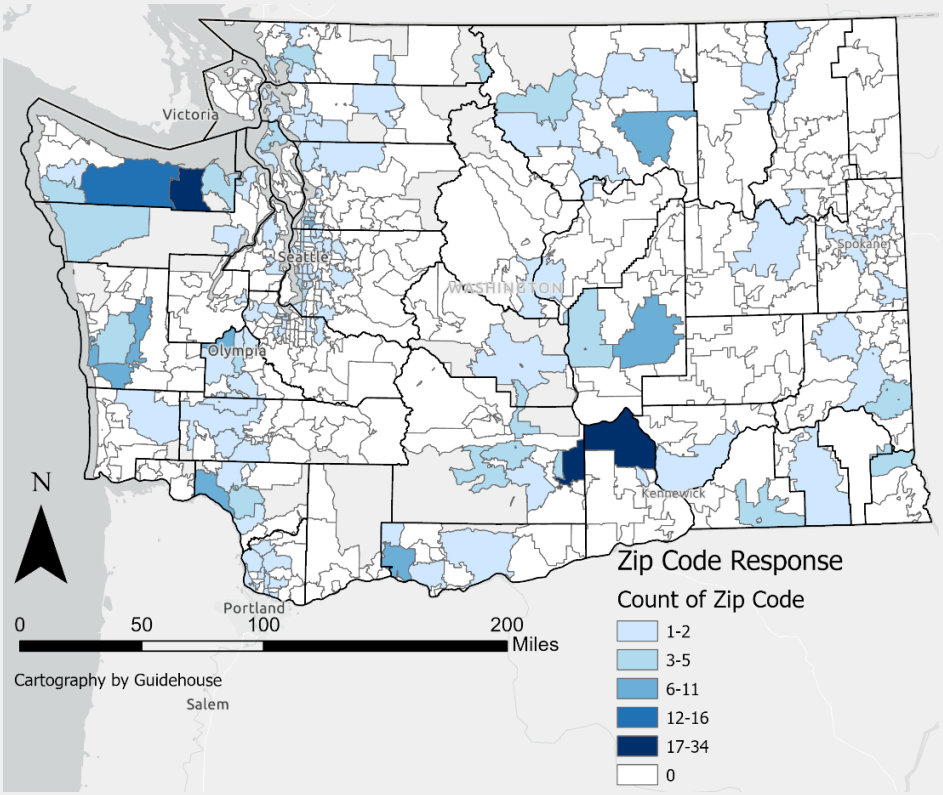
Map 19: Locations of In-Person Engagement Events (May – June 2023)

Source: Locations of in-person outreach events

The purpose of the public engagement events has been to allow Washingtonians across the state to be engaged in the planning process, share the needs of their communities, contribute ideas for how to meet digital equity and universal access goals and build and strengthen partnerships that will be critical to the implementation of the BEAD Plan and Digital Equity Plan. To hear perspectives that may have been missing from previous outreach attempts, multiple methods were used to reach out to invite stakeholders including e-mail blasts, flyers, advertising in local papers, promoting through local libraries, phone calls, and other strategies that individual partners undertook. For example, for one listening session hosted by Sunnyside School District, staff advertised the session as a parent meeting and individually called and invited parents to encourage them to attend the session. Food was provided at focus groups and listening sessions as a recommended best practice, and gift cards, funded through state funding sources, were also given out at the end of in-person focus groups and mobile outreach events. This helped foster a welcoming environment and adhered to Washington state guidance on lived experience compensation recognizing the expertise and contributions of community members.[249]

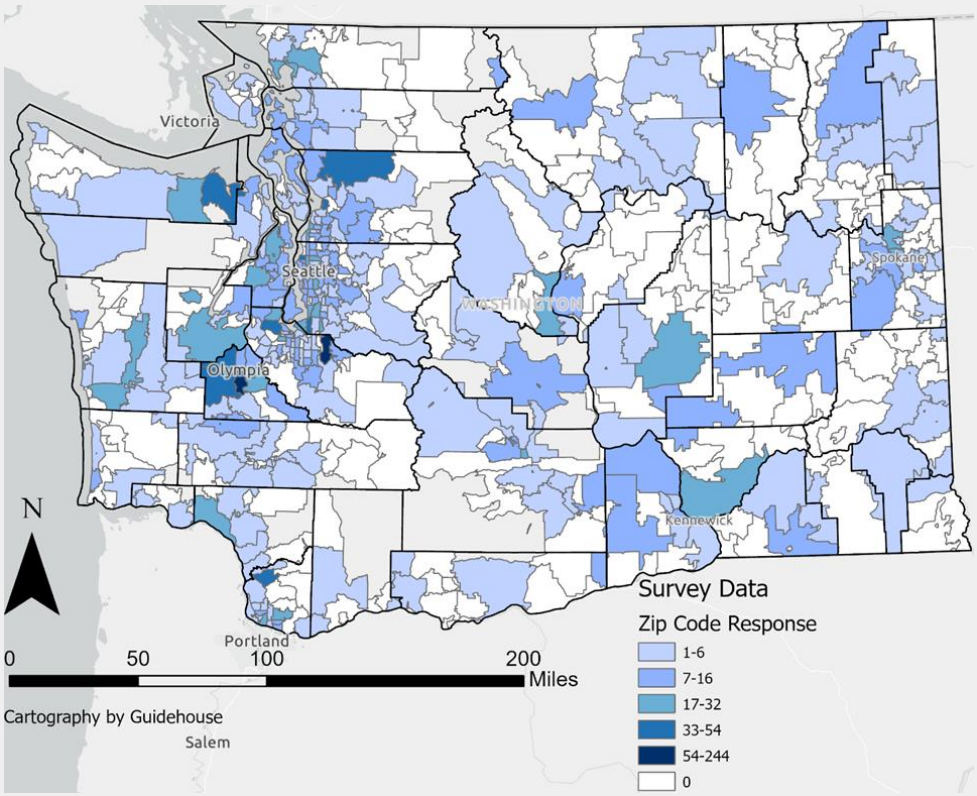
Such strategies appear to have had a large impact on engagement participation. Specifically, participation at events, described above, included covered populations who have historically been underrepresented through engagement activities conducted both virtually and in-person across the state. Additionally, **Map 20** and **Map 21** illustrate the reach of engagement for participants across the state in its public listening sessions and survey. A full list and details of public engagement activities is provided in **Appendices 7.6.**

[249] Washington State Office of Equity (n.d.), Community Compensation Guidelines. Accessed at: https://equity.wa.gov/people/community-compensation-guidelines



Map 20: Residential Zip Codes Provided by Listening Session Participants[250]

Source: Analysis of zip codes provided by participants.



Map 21: Location of Survey Respondents by Zip Code

Source: Analysis of zip codes provided by respondents

[250] Altogether, 419 participants provided 402 valid zip codes.

One important lesson that the WSBO intends to integrate into ongoing and future engagement activities is the value of attending existing community events compared to holding standalone listening sessions. Although the WSBO hosted different types of engagement activities, the engagement team found that they were able to engage with more people by attending community-organized events already planned as compared to planning an event unique only to this process. Examples of community events and services included local festivals, career fairs, public transit centers, senior center lunches, and food banks, just to name a few.

Example engagement event

The engagement team visited the food bank in Port Angeles and were able to connect one-on-one with over 80 people from various covered populations to discuss questions related to internet access, affordability, and adoption.

Acknowledging that there may still be a need for targeted listening sessions and focus groups to reach specific covered populations, the WSBO intends to prioritize events that best align with the principle of "meeting people where they are" whenever possible.

Engaging with trusted partners – schools, libraries, local and tribal officials, and community-based organizations – is critical to amplify communication, reach community members, and expand multilingual outreach opportunities. This is especially essential for those who may rely primarily on word of mouth or nondigital forms of outreach: including those who lack broadband altogether. Accordingly, the WSBO will continue to engage and coordinate with community-based organizations and CAIs as it arranges additional engagement activities during the BEAD implementation phase. The WSBO is planning to supplement the digital public comment opportunities with in-person outreach events to engage with communities during the public comment period for both the Initial Proposal and Digital Equity Plan, which should occur in September and October 2023. At these events, community members will have the opportunity to provide in-person public comments, ask questions, and learn more about Internet for All in Washington and existing available resources, such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) benefit and digital navigation services. While the exact details for these events are still being finalized, the intention for the public comment period is to ensure that communities will have the ability to engage in the review of plans and to amplify their needs.

The WSBO can help identify and coordinate objectives for engagement with partners and act as a resource through both financial and technical support to local and tribal government entities and CAIs and various organizations to directly conduct the engagement work. The following are examples of collaborative current and past efforts with partners to engage partners and stakeholders:

- The City of Seattle conducted 10 focus groups in May 2023 with questions corresponding to a survey for multiple covered populations including: individuals who live in covered households, aging individuals, individuals with disabilities, individuals with a language barrier (with a particular focus on emerging languages), and individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group. These focus group questions were mirrored closely by the WSBO's recent public engagement activities to help with data comparability.[251]
- Washington State Library recently conducted a statewide digital skills study (concluding in June 2023).[252]

Altogether, the WSBO intends to implement an engagement strategy involving five related activities, as **Figure 6** describes.

Figure 6: Ongoing Engagement Strategy

1. ***Identify Partners and Stakeholders.*** To capture full public engagement from distinct covered populations and stakeholders, it is helpful to target a fixed population with a related outreach method.
2. ***Determine Method of Outreach.*** Consider a variety of data gathering measures, as unserved or underserved communities are hard to reach using traditional, digital methods. Offline methods may include door-knocking or texting residents.
3. ***Clarify Intended Result of Outreach and Engagement.*** Depending on the method of outreach, clarify the intended result of public engagement efforts – e.g., give updates on project rollout, provide opportunity for feedback, or facilitate forum for larger discussion.
4. ***Establish and Allocate Necessary Resources.*** Resources may include funding, staff, time, or content creation.
5. ***Incorporate Feedback into Digital Equity Strategy.*** Iterative understanding and incorporation of partner and stakeholder feedback can act as a benchmark for success in meeting community needs.

[251] City of Seattle Information Technology Department (2023). *Technology Access and Adoption Study: Qualitative Research Report*. Accessed at: https://seattle.gov/techaccessstudy.
[252] Washington State Library (2023). *Digital Skills Assessment*. Accessed at: https://washstatelib.libguides.com/c.php?g=1323079.

4.1.2 Identification of Stakeholders

To ensure that all covered populations are involved in ongoing engagement, it is necessary to identify a multitude of partners and stakeholder organizations that work alongside covered populations or represent individuals from covered populations. Additionally, tribal government and stakeholders may become implementation partners, so identifying different types of stakeholders who will play different roles and can expand the reach of both outreach activities and program impact is important. **Table 29** below contains a preliminary stakeholder list by type with over 260 organizations. The full list of tribal governments, stakeholder organization names and the covered populations they serve is in the **Appendix 7.5**. This list has been developed as part of the planning process and will function as a living document, as various partners continue to introduce additional stakeholders through engagement activities.

Table 29: Summary of the Number and Type of Partners and Stakeholder Organizations as of July 2023

Stakeholder Type	Count by Stakeholder Type
Adult education agency	1
Civil Rights Organization	2
CAIs	19
County or municipal government	26
Economic development organization	18
Faith-based organization	1
Higher education institution	6
Internet service provider	44
Key stakeholder partnership	9
Labor organization or union	3
Local educational agency	11
Nonprofit organization	30
Organization representing aging individuals (60+)	1
Organization representing immigrants	1
Organization representing underrepresented communities	3
Other (Primarily technology and telecommunications related)	32
Public housing authority	3
Public utility district	12
State agency	17
Tribal government or organization	23
Workforce development organization	7
TOTAL	269

4.1.3 Determine Method of Outreach and Engagement, Clarify Intended Result of Outreach and Engagement, and Establish and Allocate Necessary Resources

Ultimately, the most appropriate outreach and engagement method will depend on the intended audience and results. Below, **Table 30 and Table 31** outline outreach methods the WSBO is currently using to engage with general population or specific covered populations, and additional outreach methods that the WSBO could potentially use for future engagement activities, respectively. These tables are non-exhaustive as, overall, the selected method will need to be tailored for potential partners, message and intended results, resources needed, platform or format, and outreach administrator for each engagement effort. To ensure consistency for all engagement activities, the WSBO will review engagement material and objectives with partners for communication consistency and goal alignment. As such, the WSBO will need sufficient outreach and engagement administration resourcing. The WSBO team is planning to hire a policy and legislative manager who will help to lead stakeholder and partner communications working closely with the current broadband engagement coordinator and will continue to evaluate resourcing needs as BEAD-related program activities commence.

As described in **Table 30**, digital navigators can help with targeted outreach in unserved and underserved areas and can provide the opportunity for two-way engagement methods for both sharing and receiving information about community connectivity and digital inclusion needs. The next cohort is scheduled to begin in September 2023.[253] As service providers who will be working with underrepresented communities offering one-on-one assistance, there is a great opportunity for outreach through this program. Digital Equity Forum members will continue to be engaged through regular meetings to seek input on the Digital Equity Plan, which will also include strategies for outreach to communities of interest and covered populations. The WSBO is considering the development of project-based sub-groups to address specific challenges as they arise. Local and tribal BATs that were formed prior to the planning process, and community partners who helped with planning and hosting engagements for the last round of public engagement may also help play an important role in public outreach and engagement. Additionally, as facilitators of recently submitted Community Action Plans, BATs will continue to be a resource through project implementation, providing the WSBO with information as projects are deployed. The WSBO has devoted a staff person to interface with BATs as a liaison for BATs to engage regularly. The WSBO will also continue to consult the steering group it formed as part of the planning process for the Digital Equity Plan, which includes representatives from the Office of Equity, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC), and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). The WSBO will also solicit input from Washington State Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) regarding BEAD and Digital Equity Program planning.

[253] Washington State Department of Commerce (n.d.), Digital Navigator Program. Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-navigator-program/

Table 30: Currently Utilized Outreach Methods

Outreach Method	Category	Description
BAT Meetings	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) • Economic development associations • Schools and libraries
	Message & Intended Results	• Liaison between local broadband advocates and the state. • Local champions for broadband and digital equity initiatives.
	Resources Needed	• Continued financial and technical support from the WSBO
	Platform or Format	• Virtual and in-person meetings
Digital Equity Forum Meetings	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Digital Equity Forum Members and extended networks
	Message & Intended Results	• Ensure healthy relationships with tribes, key stakeholders, and members by creating an ongoing platform for feedback, reception, and communication.
	Resources Needed	• Funding to staff and support forum activities.
	Platform or Format	• Virtual meetings accessible by using mobile-friendly platforms and call-in options for those without broadband. • Meetings to be recorded and posted for later viewing.
Digital Navigator Program	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Public Housing Authorities • State and local libraries • Nonprofit umbrella organizations • Community health networks • Community-based organizations • Dept. of Veterans Affairs
	Message & Intended Results	• Expand the utilization of Digital Navigators through targeted outreach in unserved and underserved areas and include built-in opportunities for feedback and two-way engagement methods to ensure high-quality deliverance and program sustainability.
	Resources Needed	• Continued support for digital navigators to expand into unserved and underserved areas. • Continued program funding.
	Platform or Format	• Virtual meetings accessible by using mobile-friendly platforms with call-in options for those without broadband. • In-person workshops and training sessions.

Outreach Method	Category	• Description
Internet for All Webinars	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Digital Navigator Grantees (to be selected) • Other community-based organizations • State agencies
	Message & Intended Results	• Updates will be provided on the state's plans for accessing and investing federal funds to bring high-speed broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved communities. Participants can ask questions and share challenges their communities are facing.
	Resources Needed	• The WSBO and NTIA staff to present on BEAD and Digital Equity grants
	Platform or Format	• Virtual meetings accessible by using mobile-friendly platforms and call-in options for those without broadband. • Meetings to be recorded and posted for later viewing.
Surveys	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Stakeholder groups, including ISPs, workforce development councils, associations, local government, schools, hospitals etc.) • Local and tribal BATs • Community-based organizations serving covered populations
	Message & Intended Results	• Distribute surveys to key partners, stakeholder groups and community-based organizations to help with disseminating more widely to understand needs and challenges, measure progress.
	Resources Needed	• Staff to create and disseminate surveys. • Resources to analyze and report results. • Time to adequately engage with partners and stakeholder groups.
	Platform or Format	• Digital and paper-based surveys
TVW (public broadcast network)	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Local and tribal government communication teams
	Message & Intended Results	• Opportunity to disseminate information widely and for people to get information if they do not have internet.
	Resources Needed	• TVW staff availability
	Platform or Format	• Live broadcast and virtual recording

Outreach Method	Category	• Description
Website and digital equity dashboard (*to be released*)	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Communication teams from engagement with tribal nations and stakeholders.
	Message & Intended Results	• Update key governmental agencies on the progress and implementation of broadband expansion efforts. • Disseminate vital information to encourage ongoing engagement, such as future meetings and conferences. • Encourage two-way engagement via submission boxes and link to online surveys embedded into the website where the dashboard will be published.
	Resources Needed	• Technical team to format and update website • Staff to monitor broadband efforts and produce online content
	Platform or Format	• Accessible webpage

Different levels of resources will be needed depending on the outreach and engagement activity and to create new and updated materials for. For example, running community engagement workshops will require more staff resources than deploying surveys. Some outreach methods may also be recurring whereas some methods may be conducted on a more ad hoc or once-off basis; for example, newsletters may be sent on a monthly cadence, whereas specific engagement events such as TVW broadcasting may occur once a year as part of a promotional campaign to build awareness around a specific program like the ACP. **Table 31** provides additional examples of potential ongoing outreach methods that could be utilized in the future to reach both the general population and specific covered populations. As mentioned previously and documented in the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan, the WSBO's soon to be hired policy and legislative manager and broadband engagement coordinator will work together to plan the most relevant outreach methods for different phases of the program and tailor as needed for underrepresented communities and will determine if supplemental staff resources may need to be contracted or where it is possible to leverage existing communications support from Department of Commerce and other state agencies who may work with various populations. For example, the Department of Youth, Children, and Families would be an ideal partner for outreach related to youth in foster care.

Table 31: Examples of Potential Outreach Methods and Partners for Future Engagements

(Example engagements are listed beginning with those focused on general populations then specific covered populations)

Outreach Method	Category	Description
Newsletter	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Local and tribal BATs • State Board of Technical and Community Colleges • Association of Washington Cities • Chambers of Commerce • Education and workforce development organizations • Community anchor institutions • Nonprofits and civil rights organizations • Washington state Community Action Partnerships
	Message & Intended Results	• Share updates on project timeline focused on education and workforce development and opportunities for community feedback in English, Spanish, and other languages. • Provide repeated and consistent opportunities for public engagement.
	Resources Needed	• Staff to write newsletter content. • Funding to print/mail out physical copies. • Translators
	Platform or Format	• Virtual newsletter via email • Multilingual hard copy newsletters at community anchor institutions.
Social media	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Office of Equity • State agency communication teams • Nonprofit organizations
	Message & Intended Results	• Spread awareness about available resources related to digital equity programs. • Instructions on how to sign up or where to go to get help to apply for assistance.
	Resources Needed	• Staff to develop social media content. • Social media accounts
	Platform or Format	• LinkedIn • Twitter • YouTube • Instagram • Others

Outreach Method	Category	Description
Attending existing social cultural events for various covered populations	Population	• Aging individuals • Individuals with disabilities • Individuals with language barriers • Racial/ethnic minority groups • Rural populations • Veterans
	Potential Partners	• Local and tribal BAT members • Chambers of commerce • Associations • Nonprofit umbrella organizations • Arts councils • Museums • Community-based organizations • State and local government
	Message & Intended Results	• Solicit feedback from covered populations regarding broadband issues such as: connectivity, speed, digital literacy, and outreach efficacy. • Conduct ACP outreach.
	Resources Needed	• Staff to attend events and conduct outreach.
	Platform or Format	• Informational one-pager • Comment box for tabling • Incentives for people to stop by
Reentry council meetings	Population	• Incarcerated individuals
	Potential Partners	• Department of Corrections • State Reentry Council • Reentry grant program providers
	Message & Intended Results	• Connect with organizations who serve incarcerated individuals to understand digital skills gap and training needs.
	Resources Needed	• Staff to attend council meetings and communicate with Department of Corrections, Reentry Council staff, program providers.
	Platform or Format	• Virtual engagement

4.1.4 Incorporate Feedback into Digital Equity Strategy

While it will not be possible to incorporate every piece of feedback received through engagement activities, the lived experiences shared by covered populations and suggestions for ways to address barriers, gaps, and needs will be synthesized and reviewed for key themes and insights that can be used to iteratively improve the state's overall strategy for achieving broadband goals. Overall, the proposed public engagement process should be viewed as a high-level planning document that lays out general goals, objectives, and methods. However, the details of outreach and engagement will need to be developed in partnership with the tribes and key stakeholders according to resource availability, scheduling, and adapted as needed over the course of the five-year grant period. Interagency, local, and tribal coordination efforts through multiple platforms and organizations (see **Appendix 7.6** and **Appendix 7.7** for lists of organizations and Tribes engaged with to date) will be important to meet outreach and engagement goals, and the overarching vision for universal access across the state. Adaptation of the plan will depend on feedback from the public and identification of engagement gaps, which may require very targeted and flexible outreach approaches.

4.1.5 Tribal Consultation and Engagement

Both formal tribal consultations and less formal engagement are important components of the engagement process in partnership with tribes in Washington state. The WSBO has developed a tribal communications and outreach plan for continued engagement, which is included in **Appendix 7.8.** Methods of engagement will include but are not limited to:

- Formal government to government consultation
- Regional consultation events in locations identified by and hosted by tribes
- Virtual and in-person listening sessions
- 1-on-1 conversations between subject matter experts

The WSBO has reached out to all 29 federally recognized tribes throughout Washington with an official "Dear Tribal Leader Letter" and hosted three listening sessions that all tribes were invited to attend. Members from 14 tribal nations participated. Staff from the WSBO and the NTIA have also attended multiple meetings and had discussions with tribal leaders throughout the planning process – including at the mid-year convention for the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) and the Federal Communications Commission Tribal Workshop hosted by the Lummi Nation in July – and will continue to do so throughout the implementation of the program. Formal tribal engagements to date are documented in **Table 32**. In response to feedback received by tribes during this process, the WSBO has partnered with the Nisqually and Spokane Tribes to host in-person regional consultation events that were held on August 8 and 15, 2023. Additionally, the WSBO will be available throughout the September 18 – 21, 2023 at ATNI's upcoming meeting for consultation with tribal leadership. The WSBO will continue to reach out and partner with tribes to identify preferred opportunities for consultation.

Table 32: Formal Tribal Consultation and Engagement Activities to Date

Name of Tribal Nation	Dear Tribal Leader Letter (Y/N)	Listening Session 1 (6/26/2023)	Listening Session 2 (6/28/2023)	Listening Session 3 (6/29/2023)
Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation	Y	Y	Y	
Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation	Y	Y	Y	
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cowlitz Indian Tribe	Y	Y		
Hoh Indian Tribe	Y			Y
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe	Y		Y	
Kalispel Tribe of Indians	Y			
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe	Y			
Lummi Nation	Y	Y	Y	Y
Makah Tribe	Y		Y	Y
Muckleshoot Indian Tribe	Y			
Nisqually Indian Tribe	Y	Y		
Nooksack Indian Tribe	Y	Y		
Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe	Y			
Puyallup Tribe	Y			
Quileute Tribe	Y			
Quinault Indian Nation	Y	Y		
Samish Indian Nation	Y			
Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe	Y			
Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe	Y			
Skokomish Indian Tribe	Y			
Snoqualmie Indian Tribe	Y			
Spokane Tribe of Indians	Y			
Squaxin Island Tribe	Y			
Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians	Y		Y	
Suquamish Tribe of Indians	Y			
Swinomish Indian Tribe	Y	Y		
Tulalip Tribes	Y	Y	Y	
Upper Skagit Indian Tribe	Y			

As sovereign nations with their own plans and goals for digital equity and data sovereignty, collaborating with tribes will be extremely important to expanding digital connectivity across Washington. As the state implements activities intended to close the digital divide, continuous engagement including data and information sharing with tribes will be crucial to understanding gaps and success.

4.1.6 Applicant and Subgrantee Technical Assistance and Feedback

The WSBO also recognizes the need to provide technical assistance to potential subgrantees prior to application submittals, which may include workshops and events like technical assistance webinars or in-person information sessions like those that were held by the NTIA. Additionally, to be responsive to subgrantees, once subgrantees have been selected and funding is awarded, the WSBO will establish regular check-in meetings with subgrantees for two-way feedback and to ensure that subgrantees remain compliant with both federal and state requirements for the BEAD and Digital Equity grant funding.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

To address the needs of the covered population identified in **Chapter 3.2**, the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) plans to implement strategies to increase digital access, affordability, and adoption among the covered populations in partnership with agencies like the Office of Equity, Digital Equity Forum members, Digital Navigator Program awardees, and many other state and community-based organizations. While some strategies are expansions of successful digital programming, the WSBO hopes to implement innovative and sustainable ideas to increase reach and participation of the covered population.

The WSBO is committed to ensuring sustainability for the work outlined in this plan. Washington State's robust network of digital inclusion assets, local and regional digital equity champions, and state legislation allows the WSBO the opportunity to embed digital equity principles into programs and resources within the state. The overarching objective of the strategies is to integrate digital equity into existing and new efforts that serve covered populations. These strategies leverage existing and future digital equity resources and considers current and future conditions, such as workforce needs, of Washington state to safeguard sustainable outcomes.

The WSBO also intends to measure the success of the strategies through data monitoring and Key Performance Indicator (KPI)s, as well as convening partners who work with and individuals from covered populations to understand opportunities to iterate on the strategies, regularly evaluating and updating as needed.

Each strategy is designed to achieve the measurable objectives introduced in **Chapter 2**. Below, each of the five measurable objectives are organized with strategies and actions, or activities to achieve the strategies. Each measurable objective also includes a measure of success that the WSBO will utilize to understand progress towards improving digital equity among the covered populations and identify if there are any gaps that may need to be addressed to help "course correct" or supplement existing activities if needed. Potential ways to measure success are described in **Section 5.1** and includes both quantitative and qualitative information such as ACP enrollment data and survey responses.

5.1 Implementation Strategy & Key Activities

5.1.1 Strategy 1: Expand broadband availability and increase affordability.

Ensuring that broadband infrastructure is available across Washington state is the first step in bridging the digital divide. A critical next step is to create opportunities for these services to be affordable, so that even after broadband infrastructure has been expanded into neighborhoods, the service can be easily adopted by households and businesses without the cost presenting a barrier for low-income individuals.

5.1.1.1 Activity 1.1: Monitor Washington state Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) investments to ensure alignment with digital equity goals.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Require BEAD subgrantees to demonstrate how they plan to conduct outreach and engagement with covered populations in service areas as part of their application. • Convene internet service providers (ISPs), state agencies, and local partners to encourage digital equity coalition building for BEAD planning process. • Embed equity into workforce planning efforts related to BEAD deployment project.
Description
The BEAD Five-Year Action Plan details how the state intends to support broadband infrastructure deployment and support unserved and underserved populations. This strategy within the Digital Equity Plan intends to complement that work by ensuring that the deployment process is equitable, and resources are reaching the covered populations across Washington state. While the BEAD program will include equity requirements for subgrantees, for example, demonstrating how their projects help support long-term objectives laid out in the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and Initial Proposal, this will also involve building coalition support to achieve the shared goals of reducing digital inequalities within Washington state.

5.1.1.2 Activity 1.2: Support Washington Community Anchor Institutions (CAI)s to improve and increase the number of free, public Wi-Fi locations.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Work with CAIs to update the Washington state Drive-in Wi-Fi Hotspots location finder, crowdsourced statewide database of free Wi-Fi locations, and identify gaps in service locations. • Identify and improve existing CAI broadband connectivity and expand networks to meet 1 Gbps service standards. • Discuss opportunities for public and private ISPs to provide free public Wi-Fi for neighborhoods with high need such as areas with a high concentration of low-income households in partnership with local CAIs.
Description
Free, public Wi-Fi locations across the state offers opportunities for individuals to gain access to the internet regardless of their level of access at home. Locations for free internet can include additional library locations, parks, schools, and other community anchor institutions. With more publicly available Wi-Fi locations, the state will provide opportunities for all to get connected.

5.1.1.3 Activity 1.3: Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in subsidized broadband service for low-income communities.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Work with digital navigators, local and tribal governments, and coalitions such as the Broadband Action teams (BATs) to expand outreach and enrollment support for covered populations into programs that subsidized broadband services. • Launch statewide outreach campaign in partnership with the Office of Equity focused on the covered populations to raise awareness about programs that subsidize broadband services, such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). • Encourage and partner with ISPs to support the development of low-income service plans that can reduce affordability barriers for low-income residents as outlined in the initial proposal.
Description
Tailoring statewide outreach campaigns for the covered populations will improve general awareness of the resources available to further identify gaps in digital inclusion available programming. Local leaders and digital equity champions will expand outreach to covered populations. The approach will include improved, accessible online resources; in-person capabilities of community organizations and active coalitions. Additional efforts will include pamphlets and other advertising media distributed across libraries, health clinics, education institutions, and other high-trafficked community buildings; advertisements for newspapers, radios, billboards, and television channels; a culturally sensitive, youth-friendly social media campaign sponsored by communication teams at state agencies; and/or related in-person events.

5.1.1.4 Activity 1.4: Utilize Washington state Digital Equity Dashboard to identify gaps in broadband services for covered populations.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Coordinate with state agencies to identify digital equity assets and other data that may be relevant to include on the Digital Equity Dashboard. • Design a user-centered digital equity dashboard with story maps that help track broadband access metrics alongside geographic data on covered populations for whom data is available across the state. • Develop crowdsourced mapping locations of digital equity related events and projects over time. • Utilize dashboard to help share progress towards digital equity goals and to provide open data in a centralized location for the public.
Description
Transparently sharing data supports the ability to monitor that the distribution of resources for broadband deployment and digital equity initiatives reaches covered populations and prioritizes unserved and underserved areas. The Digital Equity Dashboard can also potentially be used to track clearly defined access and affordability metrics alongside geographic data as more data becomes available during the implementation of the BEAD and Digital Equity Act Programs on covered populations across the state of Washington, to track progress, and to inform long-term decision making for equitable broadband deployment and investment.

5.1.1.5 Activity 1.5: Solicit innovative solutions that can increase broadband affordability and adoption among hard-to-reach covered populations or subgroups.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Work with community organizations to assess which covered populations or subgroups within covered populations may be missing digital inclusion opportunities using qualitative and quantitative data from sources such as public engagement findings and U.S Census data on internet subscription rates in Washington state. • Enlist existing community partners to help with serving hard-to-reach covered populations. • Co-create and pilot solutions with partners that can effectively increase affordability and adoption among the hard-to-reach covered population.
Description
A key finding during public engagement was the need to work with communities to further understand unique needs of the populations. **Section 3.2** and the Community Action Plans developed by tribal and county BATs serve as a valuable starting point, but communities may identify with multiple covered populations and experience compounding complex barriers based on overlapping identities that exacerbate digital inequalities.[254] Ongoing engagement is required to dig deeper into some of the nuances across and within covered populations. One example of a locally developed solution is a "Digital Equity Census" developed by the Library of Stevens County to ascertain the root causes of not being connected to the internet, for example, due to price, availability, fear, unawareness of value, which will help digital navigators with regionally and tribally based cultural competencies to address the specific need. The WSBO can work with community organizations and coalitions serving covered populations to create and further support grassroots innovative solutions that can increase broadband affordability and adoption and potentially be scaled up. Local, regional, and tribal community organizations in the digital equity space will be supported and strengthened by the state government through these efforts. This can uplift local needs and grassroots solutions to provide institutions with resources during statewide planning.

5.1.1.6 Measuring Success for Broadband Availability and Affordability

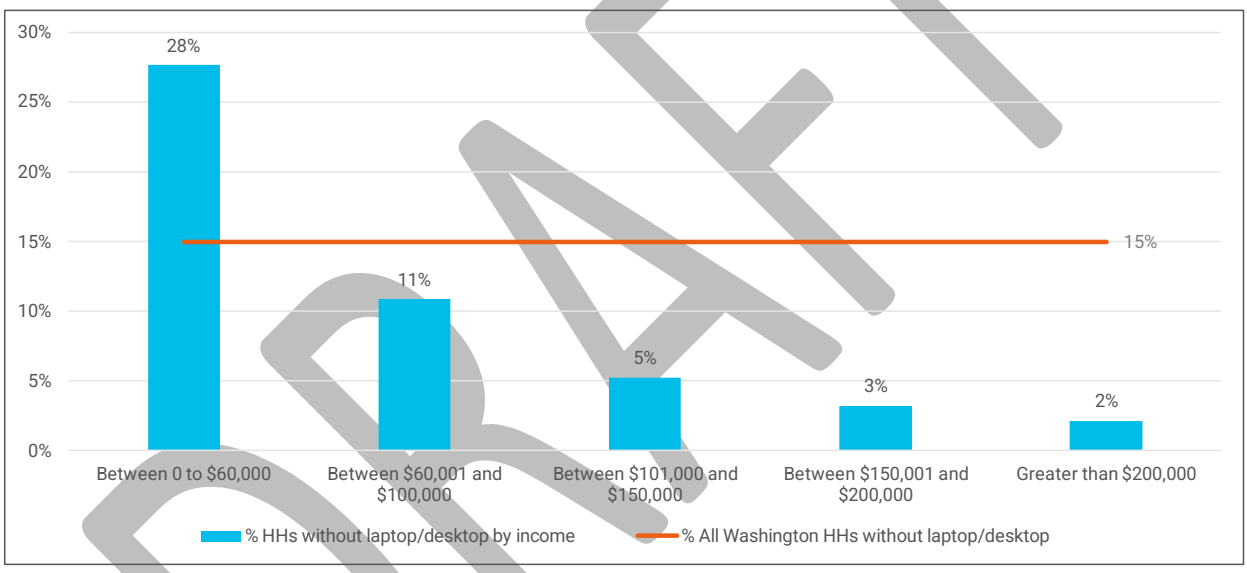
Broadband availability and affordability will be measured by a myriad of different data sources including: the number of households with internet subscriptions according to the U.S. Census; and the number of Washington residents who are eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program according to income data from the U.S. Census compared to number of residents enrolled in the program. Additionally, the BEAD Five-year Action plan will provide resources including additional data and maps to identify where the unserved and underserved populations are located allowing for the more focused digital equity strategies to address their needs. By combining these strategies and actively engaging in key activities, Washington can make significant strides in improving broadband availability and affordability, benefitting residents, businesses, and various sectors of the economy.

[254] Zheng, Y. and Walsham, G. (2021), Inequality of what? An intersectional approach to digital inequality under Covid-19. Accessed at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9761400/.

5.1.2 Strategy 2: Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability.

Currently, a higher percentage of low-income households are unable to access the digital world due to a lack of digital devices. For example, as **Figure 7** shows, households in lower income brackets have a higher percentage of households without a laptop or desktop as compared to higher income brackets and the overall state estimate with nearly 28% of households earning $60,000 or less lacking access at home. Barriers such as cost and a lack of accessible public resources that offer digital device lending programs or computer labs can result in lower digital literacy rates. The state of Washington is prioritizing access and affordability of digital devices for Washingtonians. The following strategies were developed to address the general need for modern technology to access the digital world.

Figure 7: Percentage of households in Washington without laptop or desktop by household income[255]



[255] ACS (2021), 5-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/mdat.

5.1.2.1 Activity 2.1: Leverage existing partnerships to develop innovative or proven programs like statewide device recycling programs to increase affordability.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Build upon the lessons learned from the Take it Back Network[256] Coalition and other recycling programs to explore expanding or creating a statewide device-recycling program with organizations such as private retailers, repair shops, and government organizations. • Partner with libraries to create locations to drop off devices for recycling and repair. • Partner with schools and colleges to create apprenticeships that can offer local repairs within local communities.
Description
There are a few recycling programs in Washington state, such as the E-cycle Washington run by the Washington state Department of Ecology.[257] This program offers drop off locations throughout the state to recycle computers, monitors and televisions for free. The Take it Back Network, another recycling programs, is a partnership between government agencies, retailers, repair/resale shops, charitable organizations and electronic recyclers that provides residences and small businesses with reuse and recycle options for their used computer equipment and other electronic products, like cell phones, TVs, and monitors. The network additionally offers several locations for individuals to donate, upgrade, or recycle their used computer equipment. Currently, the project is a partnership of the King County Solid Waste Division, the Seattle Public Utilities, and the Snohomish County Solid Waste Division. The WSBO can explore building upon existing partnerships with counties, schools, libraries and colleges to develop a statewide device-recycling program that builds off the work designed by the Take it Back Network, with multiple drop-off and pick-up locations across Washington to assist with recycling and upcycling used electronic equipment.

[256] King County (2023), Take it Back Network. Accessed at: https://kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/take-it-back.aspx.

[257] Washington State Department of Ecology (2023), E-Cycle Washington. Accessed at: Electronics: E-Cycle Washington - Washington State Department of Ecology.

5.1.2.2 Activity 2.2: Partner with ISPs, CAIs, and device distributes to co-develop awareness and marketing campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile network/hotspots, and free or low-cost device programs.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Utilize Digital Inclusion Asset Map, identified in **Section 3.1**, to locate mobile networks and hotspot distribution programs. • Understand utilization of the programs among the covered populations, and opportunities for the WSBO, digital navigators and other trusted messengers to support awareness of where both free network access and digital devices are available, including statewide and focused campaigns. • Expand on pre-existing hotspot distribution programs, increasing distribution locations in areas with in high covered population densities, such as school districts, rural areas, or senior and youth centers.
Description
During our digital inclusion asset inventory data collection process, mobile networks and hotspots were a main source of internet connectivity for Washingtonians across the state, particularly in areas where traveling to community anchor institutions or other buildings with publicly available Wi-Fi posed as a barrier. Mobile libraries offer open-access networks to areas within their counties that do not have a physical library location to access. Library consortia additionally offer mobile hotspot lending programs, which provide internet access to smartphones, tablets, and other wireless-enabled devices through cellular networks. This equipment can typically be borrowed by anyone with a library card and offer unlimited data plans managed by the library. Free mobile hotspots can offer individuals access to the internet, regardless of ability to pay, where fixed internet infrastructure may currently be limited, or for individuals facing housing instability.

5.1.2.3 Activity 2.3: Increase awareness and availability of programs that offer free or low-cost devices, such as tablets, smartphones, and laptops.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Utilize Digital Inclusion Asset Map, identified in **Section 3.1**, to locate device lending programs in Washington state. • Understand utilization of the programs among the covered population, and opportunities for the WSBO, digital navigators and other trusted messengers to support awareness, including statewide and focused campaigns. • Expand on pre-existing device lending programs, increasing lending locations in areas with in high covered population densities, such as school districts, rural areas, or senior centers.
Description
Washington state has an expansive network of pre-existing resources for device availability and affordability, as emphasized by the digital inclusion asset mapping in Chapter 3 of this plan. There are digital equity champions working to increase the availability of internet connectivity and access to affordable digital devices throughout the state of Washington. However, individuals—predominately those identified as part of a covered population—often are not fully aware of the resources available to them for getting online. The WSBO can work with partners like the Digital Navigator Programs and Digital Equity Forum to leverage existing Digital Inclusion Asset Map to locate device lending programs, understand how they are being used by covered populations, and later determine opportunities to expand programs, increase range of services, and/or advocate for outreach campaigns.

5.1.2.4 Measuring Success for Device Availability and Affordability

Device availability and affordability will be measured by comparing the baseline of number of households with digital devices currently in Washington, to that same data point in years to come as the strategies delineated in this chapter are implemented throughout the state. Data for the number of households without digital devices will be collected by covered populations where possible to address the disparities associated with certain populations. Specific geographic regions with a higher percentage of covered populations overlapping with unserved and or underserved locations can also be examined to measure progress over time as more households should be gaining access to broadband internet, which will likely also lead to an increase in device ownership.

5.1.3 Strategy 3: Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity.

Advocating for inclusive online experiences allows for all Washingtonians the ability to access and participate in digital society. Covered populations, such as those that identified with having a language barrier, racial and ethnic minorities, as well as those living with a disability expressed the need for a more equitable online experience, including more language translation services, culturally sensitive web designs, and user-friendly accessibility features.

5.1.3.1 Activity 3.1: Partner with trusted messenger programs and organizations to share information about digital assistance and online accessibility with covered populations.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Identify and strengthen regional trusted messenger organizations and programs such as digital navigators, Broadband Action Teams (BAT), tribes, counties, and coalitions focused on digital equity to expand awareness of online accessibility resources. • Identify and invest in programs that service covered populations, but do not yet provide digital skill and accessibility training, to expand services to include digital navigation or digital skill building. • Host digital inclusion conference to promote sharing of good practices related to online accessibility.
Description
Share information about programs such as digital navigators with covered populations through trusted messengers. Digital navigation programs are run through community organizations with navigators from the communities they are seeking to reach providing a trusted facilitator to support digital needs. For example, The Washington Department of Veterans Services (WDVS) utilizes veterans to offer support to veterans needing digital assistance. The expansion of this programs and use of trusted messengers can support online accessibility and inclusivity by providing channels to share information that will reach covered populations.

5.1.3.2 Measuring Success for Online Accessibility and Inclusivity

To measure sustainability, the WSBO can encourage feedback from covered populations and community partners to understand the user experience on government websites. This could include receiving feedback through formal channels such as surveys on the webpage, opportunities to leave feedback via social media or email, and direct feedback provided by Digital Navigator Program participants. Additionally, the WSBO will work with partners to co-create and promote shared good practices related to accessibility of online resources.

Project Spotlight:

Washington Department of Veteran Services (WDVA) Digital Navigation Program leveraged relationships with other WDVA programs and offices, the Federal VA, local Veteran Service Organizations and Vet Corps to quickly scale the strategic reach of community engagement and distribution efforts.

5.1.4 Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy.

As individuals connect to the Internet through the expansion of broadband services across Washington, digital literacy skills will become essential in providing the knowledge to navigate the digital world safely and comfortably. Several strategies implemented by the state of Washington assist with expanding digital literacy trainings.

5.1.4.1 Activity 4.1: Build upon lessons learned and consortium of Washington State Digital Navigator Program to expand digital literacy programs designed to address unique needs of covered populations.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Continue to build on the success of programs as the digital navigators by expanding partnerships with CAIs to embed the digital navigator curriculum into programs that may not be digitally focused but serve covered populations. • Engage state agencies that support covered populations to adopt digital navigator programs. • Expand digital literacy programs to increase participation of Washington residents and businesses that are served.
Description
Digital navigator programs provide residents and businesses with digital literacy training, and have had a positive impact on broadband adoption, access, and affordability for many Washingtonians. The practice of having an in-person assistant who can help individuals one-on-one with digital navigation has proven to be a successful model for increasing digital literacy. Other CAIs and state agencies should offer digital navigators as a service to help with advancing digital literacy skills and addressing the unique needs of their community. Advocating for more funding to digital skills and digital literacy training programs – whether it is disbursed to community or technical colleges, to libraries, nonprofits, or towards a general fund to incentivize public-private partnerships – will increase opportunities for digital learning across the state. It would also increase available resources that could expand programs to offer more classes, at different days and different hours, to accommodate for individuals with strict schedules. Additional resources would also increase the ability to have more one-on-one trainings, in-person workshops, peer-to-peer learning groups, and classes available in different languages.

5.1.4.2 Activity 4.2: Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to expand community partnerships that provide increased knowledge and skills enabling covered populations to participate in changing workforce needs.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Work with state partners to identify digital skill gaps within the public and private sector in Washington state.
- Coordinate with educational institutions, workforce boards and coalitions to expand training programs to upskill the workforce.
- Encourage public and private institutions to provide increased access to on-the-job digital skill training programming and resources.

Description

The WSBO supports skill building and training that will better equip underserved individuals with the skillsets needed to be hired into well-paying positions that address workforce needs. These efforts will additionally help individuals with becoming self-reliant and empowered, by acquiring skills and tools to help with a job search. The WSBO can support potential partners like educational institutions, workforce boards and digital equity coalitions to identify skills that should be focused on in training programs, ensuring that those skills are prioritized within digital skills program curriculums that focus on serving covered populations.

In conversation with the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and other educational institutions, workforce boards and coalitions, the WSBO has started identifying training programs at community and technical colleges across Washington that can supply the workforce necessary to deploy broadband at the scale and speed required of BEAD funding. Using the active courses pulled together by the SBCTC as a preliminary resource, the WSBO can coordinate with statewide educational institutions and the to be assembled workforce task force described in the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan to support digital skill building that tie into workforce needs. The WSBO can also convene discussions with community colleges, technical schools, workforce development boards, ISPs, and others in the development of training programs to create a workforce with the skills necessary to implement broadband projects. The goal of these discussions would be to increase access to on-the-job training resources allowing ISPs to upskill their current broadband infrastructure workforce and advance the skills of employees already invested in broadband-related career opportunities. The WSBO can also connect with the WTB in relation to their digital literacy and IT Career Equity project to find ways to intersect with supporting digital skill building for covered populations through various avenues including secondary and postsecondary education and training, career planning and guidance, and navigation of credential and certification pathways.

5.1.4.3 Activity 4.3: Build on existing partnership with the OSPI to implement innovative and proven approaches to expand student and family involvement in digital literacy services.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Identify and understand the needs of existing digital inclusion and literacy programs administered by the OSPI. • Partner with the OSPI, community organizations, and school districts to optimize existing funding opportunities and programming, such as by uplifting the OSPI's Digital Inclusion Grants by recommending increased outreach and strengthened direct grant coordination and support to school districts with technology capacity limitations. • Provide support to OSPI on aligning Digital Equity and Inclusion Grant program objectives with overall state digital equity goals related to educational outcomes and opportunities for outreach.
Description
The WSBO intends to continue strengthening their partnership with the OSPI, understanding the office's crucial role in bringing connectivity to schools, and by extension, to students, families, and communities. The OSPI has several ongoing digital literacy and inclusion programs and opportunities for funding that has successfully brought internet devices and technical support to school districts across Washington state, including the most rural and under-resourced. By identifying the needs of existing digital equity programs at the OSPI, the WSBO can leverage their expertise to support, expand, and highlight existing programming.

5.1.4.4 Measuring Success for Digital Literacy

To measure the success of the efforts put forth for improving digital literacy throughout the state of Washington, various methods and tools can be used. Surveys and questionnaires can be provided to students at digital literacy trainings and workshops to self-report on their digital skills, knowledge, attitudes, and general understanding of the material discussed. Evaluation tests can also assess digital skills and knowledge in a standardized manner. It may be recommended that programs across the state utilize standardized assessment tools[258] to create a baseline and measure the success of their programs upon participants' completion. For a statewide measure of success, the WSBO will keep track of the number of covered populations enrolling in programming under their purview, using the enrollment numbers from their 2023 contracts with digital navigators as a baseline.

[258] Some example existing tools and resources include NorthStar Digital Literacy Assessment and the International Telecommunications Union's guidebook of national digital skills assessments.

5.1.5 Strategy 5: Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security.

Feeling protected and safe online is essential to encouraging the covered populations to engage in digital society. Services such as telehealth, banking, online purchasing, and connecting with family members on social media are basic activities yet can become risky if the user does not have the skills or knowledge to maintain safety online.

5.1.5.1 Activity 5.1: Support the Statewide Cybersecurity Strategy to protect data and privacy of covered population online.

COMPONENTS
• Collaborate with the Washington State Office of Cybersecurity to spread awareness of cybersecurity standards and require that subgrantees projects have cybersecurity risk management plans, as required by the BEAD Notice of Funding. • Coordinate a cybersecurity best practices campaign for Washington residents, including tools and resources such as how to recognize and report online scams, free antivirus software and other security resources. • Recommend the inclusion of cybersecurity tools within digital navigator training.
Description
The WSBO will support the Washington state Office of Cybersecurity in implementing their statewide cybersecurity strategy. This includes supporting the office in a campaign tailored to the covered populations that increases awareness of ways to stay safe online. Washington residents, especially those most vulnerable to scams, including aging populations, those with a language barrier, veterans, and low-income populations, need tailored campaigns that provide information on how to protect data and privacy online. The campaign should also include tools and resources, such as how to recognize and report online scams, free antivirus software and other security resources. The WSBO will work with the Office of Cybersecurity to develop compliance requirements that ensure that subgrantees have adequate cybersecurity risk management plans in place prior to allocating funds to a subgrantee. Other partners such as local governments and community groups can assist in reaching covered populations by disseminating information to their communities through listservs or printed pamphlets. These skills and tools can also be shared with communities through programming such as digital navigators, providing hands-on tools to remain safe online.

5.1.5.2 Activity 5.2: Partner with internet service providers (ISPs) to promote cyber security standards.

COMPONENTS
• Advocate for ISPs to increase cybersecurity standards including ensuring that covered populations are protected online through threat monitoring, firewall features, and reporting suspicious activity across their networks. • Encourage ISPs to share user-friendly, multilingual, and accessible information and best practices for protecting data and privacy online with customers.
Description
Some internet service providers are already investing in digital equity efforts across Washington State. These efforts include increasing programs like digital navigators and creating more public Wi-Fi zones. In addition to digital skill support, ISPs can participate in ensuring covered populations are safe and protected online through threat monitoring, implementing firewall features, and reporting suspicious activity across their networks. ISPs can also share information with their customers around trends in cyber threats and resources to improve user awareness. ISPs who apply for BEAD funding could be incentivized to participate by including secondary selection criteria that awards some number of points to applicants who participate in digital equity-related activities including promoting cyber security among covered populations.

5.1.5.3 Activity 5.3: Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to conduct outreach and engagement, provide in-person trainings, and tools and educational resources related to online privacy and cybersecurity.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Equip digital navigators with resources including standardized cybersecurity curriculum, best practices for online privacy, and cyber security training tools. • Utilize digital navigators to serve as messengers and support for covered populations related to cyber security. • Provide resources to other state agencies and community-based organizations that may provide digital navigator related services.
Description
Digital navigator programs like the Digital Navigator Program funded by the Department of Commerce are essential for providing digital support for covered populations. These programs serve as hands-on support to Washingtonians through community organizations that provide one-on-one digital skills training throughout the state. Due to their relationships with their communities, including covered populations, digital navigators are uniquely equipped to support with outreach, sharing messages and resources with communities, to conduct outreach, provide in-person trainings, and tools related to cybersecurity and how to protect personal information online.

5.1.5.4 Measuring Success for Online Privacy and Cybersecurity

To measure the success of the strategy, the WSBO will continue to serve as a close partner to the Washington State Office of Cybersecurity as well as the Washington State Office of the Attorney General, where cyber incidents are reported. The WSBO can explore gathering information from digital navigators as well as ISPs to understand if and how information related to online privacy and cybersecurity is being distributed and opportunities to improve communication to reach covered populations.

5.2 TIMELINE

The timeline below sequences the implementation of the strategies over the next five (5) years. The table below illustrates planning as well as years for implementation for each strategy. Additionally, the WSBO plans to review progress towards the measurable outcomes for covered populations, including feedback from tribal nations, stakeholders, evaluation of KPIs and review of the measures of success to iterate on the strategies as needed.

KEY	
	Planning period
	Implementation period

Table 33: Digital equity strategy timeline

Timeline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Strategy 1: Expand broadband availability and increase affordability.					
1.1 Monitor Washington state Broadband Equity Access and Deployment investments to ensure alignment with digital equity goals.					
1.2 Support Washington CAIs to improve and increase the number of free, public Wi-Fi locations					
1.3 Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in subsidized broadband service for low-income communities.					
1.4 Utilize Washington state Digital Equity Dashboard to identify gaps in broadband services for covered populations					
1.5 Solicit innovative solutions that can increase broadband affordability and adoption among hard-to-reach covered population					
Strategy 2: Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability					
2.1 Leverage existing partnerships to develop innovative or proven programs like statewide device recycling programs to increase affordability					
2.2 Partner with ISPs, CAIs, and device distributes to co-develop awareness and marketing campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile network/hotspots, and free or low-cost device programs					

Timeline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
2.3 Increase awareness and availability of programs that offer free or low-cost devices, such as tablets, smartphones, and laptops					
Strategy 3: Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity.					
3.1 Utilize trusted messenger programs and organizations to share information about digital assistance and online accessibility with covered populations					
Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy.					
4.1 Build upon lessons learned and consortium of Washington State Digital Navigator Program to expand digital literacy programs designed to address unique needs of covered populations.					
4.2 Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to expand community partnerships that provide increased knowledge and skills enabling covered populations to participate in changing workforce needs.					
4.3 Build on existing partnership with OSPI to implement innovative and proven approaches to expand student and family involvement in digital literacy services.					
Strategy 5: Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security.					
5.1 Support the Statewide Cybersecurity Strategy to protect data and privacy of covered population online.					
5.2 Partner with internet service providers to promote cybersecurity standards					
5.3 Leverage the Digital Navigator Program to conduct outreach and engagement, provide in-person trainings, and tools and educational resources related to online privacy and cybersecurity.					

6. CONCLUSION

As shared throughout the public engagement sessions, digital connectivity is essential to Washingtonian's daily lives. The WSBO has been intentional in developing this Digital Equity Plan with diverse stakeholders, tribal partners, and state agencies to identify a strategy for digital equity that best serves all residents that are unserved and or underserved in Washington. In tandem with the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan, this Digital Equity Plan will help the state to support the delivery of affordable, accessible broadband and digital equity to all residents, businesses, and communities in Washington. This Digital Equity Plan serves as a foundation to show how Washington state will use NTIA's Digital Equity Capacity Grants to reach the WSBO's statewide goals of eliminating barriers to broadband and digital device access and affordability, empowering residents, and ensuring sustainability of digital equity programs.

The Washington State Digital Equity Plan presents strategies and outreach methods to reach populations that have been historically underrepresented in digital inclusion activities. The diversity in demographics, socioeconomic status, and physical location of Washingtonians means that there is no "one size fits all" approach to equipping Washingtonians with the service, tools, and skills needed to participate in today's digital society. To that end, this document identifies the strategies, planned activities, and community partners needed to enable Washington state to facilitate the adoption, affordability, and access to broadband internet, digital devices and skills, and digital equity for all. Looking ahead, this Digital Equity Plan will serve as a roadmap to improving digital equity outcomes for historically unserved and underserved communities by incorporating the voices of community leaders and individuals. The WSBO intends to devote time and resources for authentic outreach to the people and communities most profoundly impacted by digital inequity. Engaging with communities to participate in ongoing efforts, paying attention to the needs they identify and their experiences to evaluate the success of these efforts, and understanding what "success" means to different communities is a top priority as this work is implemented.

Washington will continue to build on its strong foundation of community-based digital equity planning – as demonstrated in the Community Action Plans envisioned by local and tribal government Broadband Action Teams. The state will also continue to invest in programs that support digital equity, ranging from the Digital Navigators Program, platforms like the Digital Equity Forum, and opportunities for local partners and tribal governments to build capacity to support future sustainable digital inclusion and deliver on the premise of "Internet for All."

7. APPENDIX

7.1 CROSSWALK OF WASHINGTON'S DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN AND NOFO REQUIREMENTS

Digital Equity Plan Requirements (SDEG NOFO)		Section
1	Identification of barriers to digital equity faced by Covered Populations in Washington State.	3.2
2	Measurable objectives for documenting and promoting, among each Covered Population located in Washington State.	2.2.4
3	An assessment of how the measurable objectives identified will impact and interact with other State goals (e.g., economic and workforce development, health, education, civic and social engagement, delivery of other essential services)	2.2.4
4	A description of how the State plans to collaborate with key stakeholders	4.1.2
5	A list of organizations with which the Administering Entity for the State collaborated in developing the Plan	4.1.2
6	A stated vision for digital equity	1.2
7	A digital equity needs assessment, including a comprehensive assessment of the baseline from which the State is working and the State's identification of the barriers to digital equity faced generally and by each of the covered populations in the State	3.2
8	An asset inventory, including current resources, programs, and strategies that promote digital equity for each of the covered populations, whether publicly or privately funded, as well as existing digital equity plans and programs already in place among municipal, regional, and Tribal governments	3.1
9	A coordination and outreach strategy, including opportunities for public comment by, collaboration with, and ongoing engagement with representatives of each category of covered populations within the State and with the full range of stakeholders within the State	4.1
10	A description of how municipal, regional, and/or Tribal digital equity plans will be incorporate into the State Digital Equity Plan	4.1.4, 4.1.5
11	An implementation strategy that is holistic and addresses the barriers to participation in the digital world, including affordability, devices, digital skills, technical support, and digital navigation. The strategy should (a) establish measurable goals, objectives, and proposed core activities to address the needs of covered populations, (b) set out measures ensuring the plan's sustainability and effectiveness across State communities, and (c) adopt mechanisms to ensure that the plan is regularly evaluated and updated	5.1-5.5
12	An explanation of how the implementation strategy addresses gaps in existing state, local, and private efforts to address identified barriers	5.1-5.5
13	A description of how the State intends to accomplish the implementation strategy by engaging or partnering with workforce agencies/boards/organizations, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher learning	5.1-5.5
14	A timeline for implementation of the plan	5.2
15	A description of how the State will coordinate its use of the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant funding and its use of any funds it receives in connection with BEAD and other federal or private digital equity funding	2.2.2

7.2 Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory

Asset	Description
Affordable Connectivity Program	The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford broadband services. The benefit provides a discount of up to $30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to $75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to $100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than $10 and less than $50 toward the purchase price.
Aging and Disability Services, Area Agency on Aging for Seattle and King County	The Aging and Disability Services partnered with senior center and senior housing providers to get tablets and hotspots to individuals who needed them during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and continues to provide "Community Living Connections," a free and confidential service to help find community resources and access support services.
Answers Integrated Digital Empowerment (AIDE)	AIDE assists individuals who have a household income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level with applying for the Affordable Connectivity Program, navigating online resources and services, participating in free digital skills training reach month, and receiving additional financial assistance from Answers Counseling to help purchase a digital deice or pay for the discounted internet bill.
Association of Washington State Housing Authorities	Washington's 37 Housing Authorities build homes and run a variety of housing programs that support Washington's working families, children, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. They are important business partners throughout the state, contributing millions of dollars each year to our neighborhoods through rental subsidies. Several housing authorities provide subsidized to free Wi-Fi, digital navigation services, and computer labs for residents to use.
Blue Mountain Action Council	Blue Mountain Action Council is a local nonprofit service neighbors in Southeast Washington who are experiencing poverty. They provide free one-on-one tutoring to low-income adults, including basic literacy, computer skills, English language learning, and more.
Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council	Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council is a private not-for-profit corporation primarily serving the residents of Chelan and Douglas Counties. They offer free digital literacy classes, sometimes with stipends/incentives for attendance. Classes offered to those who are in AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps, or who need digital literacy assistance, budgeting help, or help with English. The non-profit also provides device/mobile hotspot lending.
Coastal Community Action Program	The Coastal Community Action Program works with low-income individuals and families to remove barriers that prevent them from achieving economic stability in Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties.
Community Action of Skagit County	Community Action of Skagit County works to stabilize the lives of low-income individuals and families by equipping them with the resources and assistance necessary, including digital literacy classes and job training courses. They additionally provide assistance with resource navigation to find options for low-income cell phones, low-income internet service providers.

Asset	Description
Community for the Advancement of Family Education (CAFÉ)	CAFÉ is a non-profit organization that advances family and community growth through education. They serve their culturally diverse community by providing opportunities in leadership, civic and social engagement, literacy development, and academic advancement. The non-profit offers digital navigation services and assistance with enrolling in the Affordable Connectivity Program.
Computing for All	A program that seeks to break down cultural and systemic social barriers that prevent young adults of all races, genders, and abilities from exploring computer science as a potential career. These employer-mentored, project-based work programs support practicing the application of critical thinking and problem-solving to real-world work scenarios.
Cyber-Seniors	Cyber-Seniors is a non-profit organization that provides senior citizens with tech training using an intergenerational, volunteer model. Young people are provided with lessons and learning activities to train them to act as digital mentors and senior citizens gain access to adequate technology training and intergenerational communities that keep them socially connected and engaged.
Deaf-Blind Services Center	The DeafBlind Service Center is committed to assisting deaf-blind people in reaching and maintaining their highest possible quality of life and degree of personal autonomy. The center provides a number of resources to assist deaf-blind individuals with digital navigation, including a Communication Facilitator Program that helps with using screen devices, webcam devices, and other forms of technology.
Department of Corrections, Legislative Directive ESSB 5092	ESSB 5092 allocates $1,156,000 for costs relating to a pilot program for expanding educational programming to include post-secondary degrees and to secure internet connections at up to three correction institutions.
Department of Corrections, Reentry Navigation Services	The Department of Corrections offers reentry navigation services which primarily include assisting people with completing their individual reentry plan and resource navigation, including how to access supportive services such as subsidized broadband plans and digital navigation.
Digital Equity Learning Network of King County	Broad coalition of nonprofits, community anchor institutions, and local government (open to all) who meet to share resources and create workshops on best practices, funding and policy that impacts digital equity work and provides networking opportunities.
Digital Navigators Program	The Digital Navigator Program is a program of the WSBO and their community partners. Digital Navigators can help you navigate the internet, sign up for the Affordable Connectivity Program (federal low-income internet assistance), connect with government and community services, acquire digital literacy skills, and more.
Equity in Education Coalition	A statewide coalition working towards a more targeted and comprehensive approach to improve educational achievement and growth as well as closing the opportunity gap throughout the state of Washington, particularly regarding digital equity.

Asset	Description
HelpingLink	HelpingLink is a non-profit dedicated to empowering Vietnamese Americans, social adjustment, family stability, and self-sufficiency. The organization offers iPad/iPhone classes for adults and seniors within the Vietnamese community to learn translation, navigation, and communication skills.
HopeSource	HopeSource moves people to self-sufficiency by providing access to education, employment, economic development, and vital services. They offer classes to support digital literacy skills and privacy and cybersecurity needs, public Wi-Fi, computer workspaces, programs to provide affordable personal devices, and assist with Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment.
Horn of Africa	Horn of Africa is a social services organization based in the Seattle and King County area dedicated to socially integrating, politically engaging, and achieving economic self-sufficiency for East African immigrants and refugees. They have created a digital equity plan and have staff dedicated to providing digital equity services.
Independent Living (IL) Program, DCYF	The IL program is a voluntary program for youth ages 15 through 22 who are or were in foster care with DCYF or a tribal court. The program is open to all youth who meet specific eligibility requirements. Youth can be anywhere on the spectrum of transitioning to adulthood. DCYF contracts with local community-based agencies and federally recognized tribes throughout the state to provide independent living skills, including digital skills, educational support, career exploration, and daily living skills.
InterConnection	InterConnection is a program that enables digital equity by providing technology and connectivity to underserved communities through sustainable refurbishment and re-use of digital devices, as well as low-cost hotspot internet.
Kitsap Computing Seniors	Kitsap Computing Seniors is an all-volunteer organization for seniors who want to help increase each other's knowledge, skills and enjoyment of computers and technology. They offer digital literacy classes and training for seniors, as well as assist with device procurement and repair.
Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center (KIAC)	KIAC works for the well-being and empowerment of immigrants through education, advocacy, and social justice. They offer language assistance, public computer workspaces, assistance with ACP enrollment, financial literacy workshops, meeting space available for classes/training, public Wi-Fi, and have conducted employment workshops with Goodwill.
Kittitas County Veterans Coalition	The Kittitas County Veterans Coalition offers classes to support digital literacy skills, public computer workspaces, mobile hotspots or device lending programs, and assists with Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment and the Digital Navigator Program.
Korean Women's Association of Pierce County	The Korean Women's Association is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, providing multi-cultural, multi-lingual human services, regardless of race or ethnic background, to diverse communities through education, socialization, advocacy, and support. They can assist with creating email accounts, learning how to search for jobs online, and accessing Lifeline or ACP discounts.

Asset	Description
Literacy Source	Literacy Source partners with adults working to gain skills and education to create new opportunities for themselves, their families, and the community. The digital literacy program offers adult immigrants and refugees with low English language proficiency to improve their English skills while also learning basic digital literacy skills.
Mercy Housing Northwest	Mercy Housing Northwest owns and operates 54 properties throughout Washington and Idaho, providing over 5,000 families and seniors a place to call home at below-market rent. They additionally have staff to provide digital navigation to residents at seven multifamily housing properties in Pierce County, and to assist with enrolling in the ACP. Computer labs are accessible to residents through their properties as well.
Metropolitan Development Council (MDC)	The Metropolitan Development Council is a community action agency working against the tide of poverty by offering programs for behavioral health, housing, youth education, adult education, food assistance, energy assistance, and weatherization. They offer education and employment workshops, digital navigation for online applications, devices at a low-cost, mobile computer unit, computer classes, and online learning accounts through a NorthStar partnership.
NCW Tech	NCW Tech offers a variety of programs for the community, including a Community Skills Initiative to provide free digital skills trainings, Computers for Community to provide computers to children in need, Project iLumina which is a rural resilience and digital inclusion campaign that brings resources to rural communities, and Tech Help to provide access to digital resources and the skills and support needed to engage online effectively for community members in need.
Olympic Area Agency on Aging	The Olympic Area Agency on Aging operates a Mobile Assistance Van (MAV) that travels throughout the county providing Information and Assistance. They serve as a single entry-point for services for disabled adults and seniors in Grays Harbor, Pacific, Clallam and Jefferson Counties in western Washington state. Additionally, they offer assistance with homebound seniors including pilots like ElliQ, to serve homebound seniors promotes safety, health, and physical and emotional well-being.
Organizacion Centro Americano	Organizacion Centro Americano offers free computer workshops every Friday and Saturday afternoon for Spanish-speaking individuals, by partnering with Amistad School and Casa Latina to host the events. Other services include homeless employment programs, wage theft assistance, English and Spanish-language classes, as well as job skills workshops with a focus on digital skills.
Partners in Careers	Partners in Careers is a non-profit organization that strives to create self-sufficiency through specialized job training and employment services, including computer basics, digital navigation assistance, and social service assistance.
Pateros Brewster Community Resource Center (PBSRC)	PBSRC is a non-profit corporation that provides a location and infrastructure for community needs, including to connect families with critical resources including free public Wi-Fi, mobile hotspots, affordable digital devices, and a technology center with 16 laptops, four computers, scanners, printers, projectors, and other technological equipment.

Asset	Description
Pierce County Resources, Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness	The Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness has worked rigorously to consolidate resources for those experiencing homelessness and/or poverty in Pierce County, Washington to a single site. This project, Pierce County Resources, is intended to be an easy-to-use guide for those experiencing homelessness. It includes a database where individuals can locate employment and job training centers, food banks, mental health care, medical care, clothing resources, drug and alcohol treatment centers, dental care, sexual assault and domestic violence services, pregnancy services, housing supportive services, utility assistance, and more.
Prison Scholar Fund	The Prison Scholar Fund is an organization dedicated to helping incarcerated individuals access to the education they need to transform their lives. The fund enacted a Digital Navigation and Workforce Development Reentry Support Program which provided free laptops and internet services to justice involved Washington state residents, while supplies lasted.
RISE, Red de Inclusion Solidaridad y Empoderamiento	The Grays Harbor RISE Coalition brings together agencies serving the Spanish speaking and Latino community members of Grays Harbor County. As a network, they are grounded by the values of inclusion, solidarity and empowerment; and offer free resources on how to access internet subsidy programs in the area.
Rural Resources Community Action	Rural Resources Community Action helps residents in Northeastern Washington access resources for education, health, employment and training, housing, and transportation. They offer free public Wi-Fi available 24 hours, a community digital navigator, two computers for the community to utilize, and have a program to assist with cybersecurity needs.
Senior Centers	Washington state has an extensive network of senior centers, which provide free Wi-Fi and staff who can assist with digital navigation services.
SkillSource	SkillSource provides training and learning opportunities in North Central Washington to help people build new careers and help businesses develop. Eligible individuals can receive individualized, self-paced instruction in computer basics in the workplace, general digital literacy, Windows, and Microsoft Office applications. Eligibility for federal programs must be established prior to instruction.
Somali Family Safety Taskforce, Digital Literacy Program	The Somali Family Safety Task Force, in partnership with Seattle Public Libraries, provides a 10-week intro to Digital Literacy course at their New Holly Campus. Their Digital Literacy program is designed to provide low-income East African mothers living in the greater Seattle area with the opportunity to develop basic computer skills in a culturally inclusive and welcoming environment.
Sound Generations	Sound Generations is a multiservice nonprofit partnering with older adults to remove the inequities that impact aging by providing accessible, essential, and inclusive services; including in-kind donations of technology devices that would otherwise be unaffordable, as well as a network of affiliated senior centers that offer resource navigation at no cost to seniors.

Asset	Description
Special Technology Access Resource (STAR) Center	The STAR Center at SHA's Center Park property provides residents with disabilities access to specialized training and technology. Classes offered to residents include the basics of using computers, printers, scanners, and the internet as well as employment skills training, adult basic education, and ESL. The lab is free and open to the public.
TechConnectWA	The TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk provides free technical support to Washington residents to help them engage in a virtual environment. It is the nation's first multi-lingual, multi-cultural help desk staffed by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) technicians that help callers navigate the internet, telehealth calls, and online access to food, rental assistance, and socio-emotional supports.
The Asian Counseling and Referral Service's Ready to Work	The Asian Counseling and Referral Service's Ready to Work is a comprehensive program serving people with very limited English overcome language barriers, gain digital literacy skills, find meaningful employment, and achieve economic self-sufficiency.
The Carl Maxey Center	The Carl Maxey Center is a Black-led and Black-centered non-profit that acts as a neighborhood culture center, and which provides program and services focused on the needs of Spokane's Black community. Through their Student Tech Fund, the center has partnered with Comcast to provide technology and supplies for free or at a subsidized cost to student who struggled with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to prevent students of color from falling further before.
The Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program	The Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program serves patients in 39 counties across Washington remotely. It provides free digital navigation; free digital literacy skills training; affordable internet access assistance and connected device acquisition assistance for residents or households at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
Treehouse Educational Advocacy Program	Treehouse Educational Advocates support students in foster care by providing timely, appropriate educational supports and interventions tailored to each individual's academic and developmental needs. By partnering with a team of existing supports in a youth's life — caregivers, caseworkers, teachers, school counselors, and community providers — Treehouse Educational Advocates help resolve barriers and identify needed resources for the youth to make progress at school, including digital literacy skills and devices.
Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation (UNA)	Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation protects and promotes the rights of immigrants, Latinx, and underrepresented communities through advocacy, support through services, and resources. UNA serves nine counties in Washington and provides digital navigation services and phone distribution.
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle	The Urban League Metropolitan Seattle, which works to empower African Americans and other diverse underserved communities to thrive by securing educational and economic opportunities. offers an InfoTech Program designed to create a more digitally engaged community by offering digital navigation services, digital skills trainings, workshops, certification programs, and assistance with signing up for the Affordable Connectivity Program.

Asset	Description
Valeo Vocation	Valeo Vocation combats poverty and homelessness in Pierce County by offering quick access to income, combined with wrap-around support, to help participants create a path towards permanent employment and housing. The organization provides a public computer lab for job seekers to apply for programs, services, and employment; as well as free public Wi-Fi, digital navigation, and low-cost devices.
Veterans Outreach Center: VFW Post-1443	The Veterans Outreach Center in Asotin County collaborates with the County Library to get digital navigator services to veterans at the center, at no-cost.
Villa Comunitaria	Villa Comunitaria provides the program Aula Digital en Accion (Digital Classroom in Action), which is a community-driven solution to the challenges underrepresented and immigrant Latinx communities face when using technology to access jobs, apply for citizenship, engage with public schools, and access childcare and academic programs. It is a 12-week technology training program to help residents connect with online based application processes and resources.
Washington State Assistive Technology Act Program	The Washington State Assistive Technology Act program offers information, training, and access to assistive technology devices and services that can help individuals with disabilities access the internet and digital resources.
Washington state Board for Community and Technical Colleges	The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges advocates, coordinates and directs Washington state's system of 34 public community and technical colleges. These institutions of learning often provide free Wi-Fi, computer centers, digital skills training, and workforce development courses related to technological skills.
Washington state Department of Veterans Affairs Digital Navigators Program	The WSDVA Digital Navigator Program provides veterans or their families with the tools (a kit containing talk, text, and data through T-Mobile, a laptop, and a smartphone with a hotspot) and digital literacy training allowing them to connect to earned benefits such as disability compensation or pension, healthcare, and other services.
WorkSourceWA	WorkSource is a statewide partnership of state, local and nonprofit agencies that provides an array of employment and training services to job seekers and employers in Washington including in person computer skills training and virtual learning opportunities.
WSU-Extension, The 4-H Tech Changers Program	4-H Tech Changemakers explore the impact of the digital divide in their communities, learn high value digital skills, and provide adults in underserved populations with the tools to find additional opportunities for employment through expanded access to digital skills training. 4-H Youth are helping adults find jobs, understand remote work, and how to access or adopt new technology.
Youth Empowerment Program, DCYF	The Youth Empowerment Program specializes in ensuring that the children under the care of the DCYF have the tangible resources needed to participate in their educational, professional, or personal endeavors; including, access to technology such as a laptop to participate in online schooling or to for online enrollment into social services.

7.3 Community Action Plans

The WSBO has published county and tribal Community Action Plans online, which can be accessed using the link below. In some instances, counties or tribes did not provide complete information, however, the WSBO is working to incorporate the information that they did submit, so that all counties and tribes that participated in the process are represented. Finally, as discussed in **Section 5.1.5**, 16 tribes participated in this process with four tribes partnering with neighboring counties and 11 tribes submitting information independently. The four tribes that partnered with counties include:

- Kalispel Tribe (partnered with Pend Oreille County)
- Nisqually Tribe (partnered with Thurston County)
- Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe (partnered with Skagit County)
- Shoalwater Tribe (partnered with Pacific County)

The WSBO has included information for these four tribes in the 'Tribal Community Action Plans' folder.

Community Action Plans Link

7.4 WSBO ARPA Capital Awardee Affordability Programs and DE Efforts Beyond Participating in BATs

Public Utility District No. 1 of Franklin County

Franklin PUD will be developing a wholesale broadband assistance program that will be available to subscribers based on if they are already involved in a free and reduced lunch or electric service program. This data is already being gathered by the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) of Franklin County and the local school districts. Once the school districts have verified these accounts, the ISPs are incentivized to pass on a discount to the customers. Another discount often provided is Franklin PUD comparing customer's electric bill to determine cost of broadband service. If qualified, customers can match the same discount for their electrical services. Other eligible groups such as the elderly or those living with disabilities, retail service providers (RSPs) are required to offer generous discounts (up to 30%). Eligibility is determined based on information provided by organizations like Big Bend Rural Electric Association (REA).

Franklin PUD will also be working with ISPs on the technical side to bring them up to date on the new wholesale offerings and provide technical support on installations, provisioning, and troubleshooting. The PUD will provide educational information to institutions such as Mid-Columbia Library and local schools to highlight available resources related to fiber connections and job training.

Public Utility District No. 1 of Grays Harbor County

Grays Harbor PUD (GHPUD) Discount Program- Senior Discount Program: GHPUD currently offers a discount to low-income senior customers for their eclectic utility service. The PUD is evaluating if offering a similar discount for broadband services is feasible. The Senior Discount Program qualifications are as follows: -Are at least 62 years of age -Have a household annual gross income of $32,988 or less -Receive an electric bill from the P.U.D. in your name or have the bill included in your rent.

Project HELP: Through this donation fund, GHPUD in partnership with the Coastal Community Action Program (CCAP) community members may contribute to neighbors to support keeping their utilities paid up when they are experiencing financial hardship. Project Help began in 1984 and has helped many neighbors in need in the nearly 40 years of operations. This program gives local community members a chance to help other local families when circumstances have made it impossible for them to pay their utility bills. Contributions are collected in a variety of ways: -Customers of Grays Harbor PUD can contribute a small amount mailed in with their electric bill each month -Make a one-time donation by filling out the pledge payment coupon and returning it with their monthly bill payment or calling the PUD to submit a donation over the phone.

There are no administrative costs deducted by the Grays Harbor PUD or CCAP from the contributions. GHPUD and CCAP donate their time and facilities to support this important community program. Of the contributions received, 100% go to CCA.

Public Utility District No. 1 of Jefferson County

Jefferson County's PUD (JPUD) has low-income rates for its electric and water customers that will be automatically extended to eligible internet service customers as well. Eligibility is based on income, with verification done in house by JPUD staff. JPUD's low-income rate is available to customers who earn either 150% of the median federal poverty level or less or are over the age of 62 whose household income (after allowable deductions) does not exceed $30,000 per year. The low-income benefit for internet service comes in the form of a $20/mo. discount for JPUD internet service customers. A $10 discount is extended to residential customers of our open access providers, with a strong incentive to the provider to match the discount. Eligible customers can receive both ACP and JPUD low-income benefits, meaning some low-income customers could receive 150/150Mbps internet for only $15/mo.

Kittitas County

There are no installation fees for customers accessing the network and the end user rates coupled with the ACP program make this an incredibly affordable program with high-capacity broadband services.

Kittitas County intends to establish an online marketplace where consumers can engage in the best internet experience most fitting their budget. This innovative new method will provide residential and business consumers an opportunity to competitively review ISP offerings and streamline their purchase of services. Through this program, the county will offer a no-cost installation and provisioning program for all consumers of the broadband network, not just low-income households. Everyone in the community will enjoy the same program of affordability and access to the best possible products by utilizing this marketplace. Additionally, the marketplace will not be limited to terrestrial broadband providers. As many residents outside the proposed project area will still not have access to traditional ground-based connectivity options that exceeds 25/3, those local wireless providers who have worked to historically fill this gap will be able to offer services where needed. The proposed project has included fiber routing to geographic points necessary for maximum wireless coverage to provide backhaul capability for wireless ISPs.

Lewis County Public Utility District No. 1

Lewis PUD intends to establish an online marketplace that allows consumers to engage in the internet experience. This marketplace will provide residential and business consumers the opportunity to streamline their purchase of services. Through this program, the PUD will offer a no-cost installation and provisioning program for all consumers of the broadband network, not just low-income households. Everyone in the community will be able to enjoy the same program of affordability utilizing this marketplace. Furthermore, those that cannot currently use broadband will be invited to the locally developed community center where assistance on access will be provided to all community members.

The population must have knowledge of how to leverage the Internet to maximize their benefits of access. After successful network expansion, the PUD will work with the local library and

community center to provide digital literacy classes for community members, including training programs and tech support for Internet-based skills.

The Lewis County PUD Broadband Access Project will renovate an existing community center to provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant accessibility to three designated computer stations and four desks for bring-your-own-device stations. Connectivity will also be provided to households in the community that are currently unconnected or that cannot achieve broadband speeds The Baw Faw Grange #34 has agreed to become a Community Center under the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Community Connects grant. The Grange's grant funded computer stations will be accessible to the community before, during, and after regular business hours, and on weekends. The Grange is well positioned to serve in this vital role to offer connectivity to the residents of the project areas. For the Baw Faw Grange and the Boistfort Valley, broadband access will allow local students adequate access to school programs offered through the Internet, provide access to agriculture information for our local farmers, and provide critical Internet access to our local school and fire department. This community center, further discussed throughout this application, will serve as the digital equity and inclusion center that this community needs to gain adequate access and education to use, adopt, and enjoy the broadband services this project will deliver.

Lincoln County

The successful completion of the project will make future digital equity programs more relevant. The project will solve the availability of broadband for the area and efforts can focus on affordability issues (assisting users in signing up for ACP), lack of device issues (providing devices that can be used to access the internet), and knowledge-based issues (providing training and support for users to utilize the accessibility to its fullest extent).

Lincoln County's Economic Development Council (EDC) will facilitate adoption assistance activities as part of the County's efforts to address digital equity. The libraries in Lincoln County play a critical role in the addressing digital equity through technical support, digital literacy programming and the availability of devices. Each of the five libraries in Lincoln County offer public computers with free Wi-Fi that can assist in the enrollment in ACP programs. The library has e-readers available for checkout, and digital downs loads such as eBooks and audiobooks and digital literacy programs to teach patrons how to best utilize technology. Each library offers extensive research databases covering K-12 education, social sciences, science and technology, literature and language, health and medicine, world and local news, business and more. These internet resources are accessible to all patrons.

In addition, the Lincoln County libraries offer access to online courseware for technology training at no cost through the Washington State Library and Microsoft Imagine Academy. Microsoft's digital literacy program has easy multimedia courses on computer basics, the Internet and online safety without any sign-in required. Advanced users can take courses that qualify for Microsoft Certification testing. Course topics span the gamut of advanced IT use, from database classes to developer programs. The Lincoln County Libraries offer a robust collection of programs and courses designed to improve the digital literacy of those they serve.

Mason County Public Utility District No. 3

In partnership with their retail service providers, Mason County PUD 3 offers a low-income discount for qualifying services. PUD 3's electric assistance programs are very effective in providing a helping hand to customers in need. The Low-Income Fiber Discount expands assistance programs to fiber consumers and allows qualifying low-income households to see a slight reduction in broadband access costs. This discount amounts to a $10/month reduction in wholesale costs to the retail service provider. Participating retailers have made a commitment to not only pass on the discount to the end user, but to match it with an additional $10/month discount. This means, qualifying customers are eligible to receive a $20 monthly discount on their internet bill and bring the price of gigabit broadband below the advertised cost of DSL in Mason County. These customers will no longer have to decide between inadequate internet and affordable service. Now, they can get the best internet available at incredible prices. There are no speed or data caps associated with the low-income fiber discount. Qualifying customers for the Low-Income Fiber Discount program are low-income seniors aged 61 years and older with permanent, not federally subsidized housing served year-round by PUD 3 and an adjusted household income of less than $40,000 per year; and low income disable citizens with permanent, not federally subsidized housing served year-round by PUD 3 and qualified by through the Community Action Council. Disabled customers are those that meet at least one of the following criteria: have a special parking permit, i.e., card, decal or special license plate for the disabled as set forth in RCW 46.16.381 (1), (a) through (f); meet the definition for the blind as set forth in RCW 74.18.020; or have 100% disability as determined by the Veterans Administration or qualify for Social Security Income or Social Security Disability benefits by reason of a disability.

PUD 3's retail Internet Service Providers offer outstanding technical support and site visits, during installation and when necessary, to end users to ensure their home and business networking connections are functioning appropriately. All of PUD 3's retail Internet Service Providers are required to offer customer service availability 24/7 through phone and email; Hood Canal Communications offers written tutorials on how to set up and use their email services. Advanced Stream staff, including their CEO, regularly make house calls to support their customers' technology needs.

Okanogan County Electric Cooperative

The Okanogan County Electric Cooperative (OCEC) project partners will continue their important work with local community organizations such as the Okanogan County Community Action Council, Room One, and the Cove (a local Food Bank) to provide outreach and enrollment assistance related to the ACP program. In addition to participating in the FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program, Methownet offers affordable service plans to residents who are enrolled in social service programs for the economically disadvantaged or physically disabled within the community. There is not a formal process in place. Instead, if a person asks for help, Methownet will assist them. Additionally, the Methownet team has gone above and beyond to discreetly work with customers, as needed, to provide discounts based on individual needs. Methownet has, in the past, provided discounts to seniors on a fixed income and has heavily discounted services for

local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also provided a year of free service for the family of a local laborer during a significant health and income crisis.

Beyond customer service and as a community service Methownet provides phone-based network support to both customers and non-customers to promote digital literacy and assist with security issues. If needed, they will dispatch their technical staff to provide on-site support. Additionally, over the last year, Methownet's customer base has increased 15 percent with no formal advertising. Word-of-mouth advertising has also been heavily relied upon and effective in this tight-knit community.

If granted funding, and in addition to the current level of helpdesk/technical support offered, Methownet will conduct digital navigation and training outreach to increase adoption. Working in coordination with community partners, OCEC and Methownet will hold monthly outreach events to engage with residents, provide training, ACP awareness, and advance digital adoption and literacy.

Methownet has worked with area homeowner associations (HOAs) to explore both wireless and fiber solutions to improve neighborhood service. It has collaborated with both the Pine Forest HOA and the Liberty Woodlands HOA to set up wireless access points. Further, Methownet is currently working with Methow Housing Trust to deliver fiber service to two developments and has also installed conduit for future fiber for the Trust. In addition, Methownet installed a fiber conduit in the Edelweiss subdivision.

Okanogan County Electric Cooperative (OCEC) operates a monthly newsletter via email, reaching most of the residents of Methow Valley and will advertise in the local newspaper. Print media will also be used to advise the community about the project and advertise the available services, assistance programs, and training opportunities.

OCEC utilized an emailed survey of its members on December 16, 2021, to gauge interest in broadband and evaluate the internet service market. They obtained 1,084 responses. The survey results indicated that 80 percent of respondents were overwhelmingly interested in switching to fiber broadband from OCEC, demonstrating an unmet demand for fiber-based services in the Methow Valley area. They will perform outreach activities as a follow-up to this survey.

Orcas Power and Light Cooperative

Orcas Power and Light Cooperative's (OPALCO) Energy Assist Program (EAP) was started in 2016 to assist low-income households with their OPALCO electric bills on a year-round basis. This is an OPALCO administered program that is meant to ease the affordability gap in San Juan County and support the community. The program is funded through rates as a separate line item on each co-op member's monthly bill. Members must be on the standard residential rate and verify their qualification through another endorsed low-income assistance program to qualify for the Energy Assist Credit. Once an individual obtains this assistance from OPALCO, the customer can use that discount to add a $25 discount to their monthly Rock Island internet bill. The program renews annually.

San Juan Island Chamber Subsidy for Low Income: A volunteer match account between OPALCO, Rock Island, and its main lending partner CoBank holds funds that may be used for the one-time

fees for connecting to services. The San Juan Community Foundation oversees the program and the eligible disbursement of funds. An individual who is an active participant in the ACP or EAP program qualifies for assistance in onboarding fees, up to $500, to connect to the internet service.

The partnered ISP, Rock Island, provides a full suite of technical support and offers many add-on services to support network security, propagation, and configuration for IT needs. As a company based in the same location as all our users, we offer a localized support operation, with local knowledge of the network and personalized troubleshooting. The ISP also sponsors user education classes for customers who are seeking assistance in using modern technology. The Cooperative publishes a monthly magazine sent to all members that includes helpful tips and articles to support members' technological needs. Engagement continues to be a major priority of the Cooperative.

Port of Skagit County

In addition to ACP, the program fees associated with this project do not require additional subsidization plans; there are no installation fees for customers and no end user rates above the ACP subsidy that is paid to the broadband provider.

There is no need for a secondary program because the Committed ISP (Astound Broadband) is an active and enthusiastic participant in the Affordable Care Program. A $30.00 discount will be available for application to a qualified customer's service cost each month. Furthermore, Astound has committed to offer a $30.00 service to all qualified customers for the Affordable Connectivity Program in the project area, resulting in a zero-cost service for low-income households in this project area. If the subscriber requires a higher-bandwidth service, they may also have the $30.00 ACP discount applied to their service cost, thereby reducing the end-user fee.

To support this free service program, the Port of Skagit will not charge a fiber lease rate to the ISP when a zero-cost service is offered to an enrolled customer. Affordability and accessibility are critical elements for the Port, and we are committed to creating a community where all citizens have access to broadband and the skills to utilize the internet to enhance a quality of life.

Digital literacy in the Bow outlying areas project area is a priority of the Port of Skagit. The Port of Skagit leads the Skagit County BAT which is focused on digital equity and inclusion efforts countywide. The project area has an adoption rate to the Affordable Connectivity Program of 6% much lower than the national average of 17% which is a very poor result for the community. The Skagit County BAT is working to bring the enrollment numbers in the Affordable Connectivity Program countywide through the efforts of the Port and its partner organizations that make up the Skagit County BAT.

To increase the adoption rate of the Affordable Connectivity Program, the Port of Skagit is partnering with the Burlington-Edison School District to distribute information about the ACP. The school district has committed to wide distribution of this information to all students in the B-E District, in hopes of removing unnecessary barriers to learning and accessibility for their students and families, and to take another step towards digital equity in the district. Rebecca Skrinde, CEO of Helping Hands Solution Center which has a satellite location to serve this outlying area, knows firsthand of the hardships faced by her program participants. The Port of Skagit will also be

requesting the assistance of the Helping Hands Solution Center to distribute information through their program to reach people who may qualify for, and benefit from the Affordable Connectivity Program.

There are 441 potential locations in the zip code 98232 that the project area is in that are eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The ACP and its predecessor, the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB), are subsidy programs intended to help all Americans have affordable access to the technologies that drive the modern digital economy.

Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) developed a map to assist digital navigators and digital inclusion support organizations gain insight into the reach of the new Affordable Connectivity Program.

Port of Whitman County

Inland Cellular participates in the Lifeline program, which offers discounts for eligible low-income households. The successful completion of the project will make future digital equity programs more relevant. The project will solve the availability of broadband for the area and efforts can focus on affordability issues (assisting users in signing up for ACP), lack of device issues (providing devices that can be used to access the internet), and knowledge-based issues (providing training and support for users to utilize the accessibility to its fullest extent).

Affordable, robust broadband internet service – Successful Digital Navigator programs have one key prerequisite – the wide availability of adequate internet service. The completion of this project enhances the success of Whitman County Library's (WCL) Digital Navigator program that provides technical support, digital literacy, and tools. WCL's Digital Navigator program provides assistance on a range of popular devices on various platforms, as well as help with requests on lesser-known devices and applications whenever possible. WCL's gifted devices program provides a laptop and MS Office to every qualifying household, up to 19 per library branch or 266 laptops overall, providing a device that can meet the basic computing needs of everyone in the household (work, school, telehealth, entertainment, communication, finances). WCL's Digital Navigator program incorporates digital literacy skills through different types of training, including via telephone, one-on-one appointments, walk-in assistance, scheduled classes, requested topic workshops, written material, YouTube videos, resources on our website, and Zoom sessions where appropriate. In addition to helping people with hardware issues, WCL's program assists with connectivity, cybersecurity, as well as training on how to use popular software and applications. WCL provides a tiered program by providing different levels of assistance depending upon what each resident's needs are. Library staff is available to assist with ACP questions and enrollment, online resources available for job seekers and online learners, and a wide range of other topics of interest to patrons. Each library is hiring a local high school student to help people during the additional open hours each week designated for Digital Navigator assistance, bringing a new perspective and skill set (especially with social media and apps) to the program. In addition, WCL recruits volunteers from the local communities who want to help deliver Digital Navigator services during library hours. For more involved hardware or software issues, designated staff with Pullman Marketing are available, including helping people communicate effectively with their ISP if needed. Pullman Marketing also established and staffs

a hotline and email address for people needing to set up an appointment or that cannot physically visit a library. For those residents who need someone to visit their home to assist, Pullman Marketing staff connects them with private providers of such services and helps arrange appointments.

Spokane Tribe of Indians

The service provided on this network will qualify for subsidization through the FCC Lifeline Program. Lifeline is the FCC's program to help make communications services more affordable for low-income consumers. Lifeline provides subscribers a discount on monthly Internet and telephone services purchased from participating providers. Standard Lifeline provides federal monthly support of up to $9.25. The discounts, which can be applied to stand-alone broadband, bundled voice-broadband packages – either fixed or mobile – and/or stand-alone voice service, help ensure that low-income consumers can afford state-of-the-art Broadband and the access it provides to jobs, education, and opportunities.

In addition, SBS participates in the E-rate program. The local school districts can receive e-rate funds to assist in providing their students with high-quality telecommunications access. The Universal Service Fund for Schools and Libraries, or E-rate, provides discounted services on telecommunications, internet access, and internal connections for all public and private schools, and libraries. The Universal Service Program is administered by the Schools and Libraries Division (SLD). The E-rate program provides discounts of 20-90% on the cost of eligible services. Discounts are based on the number of students eligible for the National Free and Reduced Lunch Program and the location of the organization (rural or urban). To qualify for this program, the home receiving our service must have a student enrolled in 1 of the 3 school districts near this area.

Policy: Members of the Spokane County / Spokane Tribe (SC/ST) BAT, including the Spokane Tribe of Indians, have commented on national legislation, attended webinars, engaged with comments specific to challenges from the rural community perspective, and discussed ways to promote and alleviate issues for Internet Service Providers and people who wish to enroll for the ACP Program. This will continue and the SC/ST BAT will continue to advocate for and support ISPs and efforts to deploy broadband in the area.

Digital literacy and training: The Libraries of Stevens County (LOSC) has applied for funding to the WA State Broadband Office for the Digital Navigators grant. This grant sparked conversations with the Spokane Tribe of Indians and multiple agencies serving constituents who need access and digital literacy. We are developing a "Digital Equity Census" to ascertain the true issue of not being connected (price, availability, fear, ignorance of value, etc.) with trusted people in each agency and then connecting them to Digital Navigators who will be regionally and tribally based with cultural competencies to address the specific need. LOSC has secured $20K from the Better Health Together Accountable Communities of Health to begin this work and met with Providence Health and Microsoft for a larger project and effort.

Tri County Economic Development District (TEDD)

PCs for PEOPLE: PCs for People is offering discounted desktop and laptop computers with the TEDD. This program offers households a one-time discounted desktop computer for $20.00, or a laptop for $49.99, while supplies last. Customers must be currently participating in a government-based assistance program or have a qualifying household income (less than 200% of federal poverty guidelines or 60% of area median income). Before completing your purchase, PCs for People requires photo identification and income documentation to ensure that customers meet our eligibility criteria.

Customers who engage in this program can access a desktop computer for just $20 with these features: Wi-Fi-enabled refurbished desktop with Windows 10 operating system. The system includes i5 or i7 processor, 6 GB RAM, and a 500 GB or solid state drive (SSD) hard drive. Microsoft Office, antivirus software, monitor, keyboard, and mouse. A one-year warranty is also included.

Customers who engage in this program can access a laptop for just $49.99 with these features: Wi-Fi-enabled refurbished laptop with Windows 10 operating system. The system includes i5 or i7 processors, 6 GB RAM, and 500 GB or SSD hard drive. Microsoft Office, antivirus software, and an AC power adapter. A one-year warranty is also included.

Seasonal Pause: An innovative cost-saving option has been set up for customers who may travel for long periods of time or not utilize a location as a year-round residence is the opportunity to lower their service cost and speed temporarily. This seasonal pause option allows customers to reduce their service to less than 1 Mbps and pay only $15/month while they are away and up to 4 months per year. Maintaining the reduced internet connection allows customers to remotely access their internet to monitor devices like cameras and thermostats while they are away but not spending money on higher capacity service that they don't need while not at home. There are no qualifying criteria to participate in this program.

Airband Initiative: This program allows participants to build their digital skills with learning resources from Microsoft. The Microsoft Airband Initiative gives the community access to curated learning resources that can help consumers build the technical skills needed to participate in today's digital economy. These skills include Digital Literacy and the foundational skills needed to understand and safely use digital devices, software, and the Internet. Get tips for protecting your privacy, using the internet safely and combating online bullying and harassment, learning how to code, accessing computer science courses online, and sharpening technical skills through hands-on learning modules. There are no eligibility requirements for this program, and access to this service will be provided for all customers. (https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/airband)

Telemedicine Kits: The Colville School District received a $10,000 grant to purchase MiFi hotspots and pay for two months of service for graduating seniors, partnering with Libraries of Stevens County (LOSC) to manage, deploy and retain the hotspots for continued use. This led to a partnership with Providence Health Care (PHC) to solve telehealth access issues. LOSC developed five "check-outable" telemedicine kits including a hotspot puck and a laptop already loaded with Zoom software and appropriate links. Providers identify Stevens County patients who have a "prescription" for technology to participate in telemedicine appointments. The patient can

bring the prescription to the library, or phone them, to reserve a telemedicine kit to take home or use from the library parking lot on high-speed Wi-Fi. They can also receive training if necessary. In some cases, these patients are able to avoid a three-hour round-trip drive to a clinic or hospital and reduce the number of people in those clinics and hospitals.

Policy: Members of the SC/ST BAT have commented on national legislation, attended webinars, engaged with comments specific to challenges from the rural community perspective, and discussed ways to promote and alleviate issues for ISPs and people who wish to enroll in the ACP Program. These activities will continue and TEDD and SC/ST BAT will continue to advocate for and support ISPs and efforts to deploy broadband in the area. Their extensive contacts and long-term relationships have proven very effective in moving projects to completion.

Drive-In Wi-Fi Sites: One of the first Drive-In Wi-Fi projects deployed by WSU Extension was on the Spokane Indian Reservation; it became the third most visited site in the system. A second site was deployed at the Tri-County Economic Development District/WSU Extension office. The free drive-up Wi-Fi hotspots are still operational and there is no plan to end services.

TEDD Digital Equity Advocates: TEDD works in close partnership with the Stevens County WSU Extension Office on its digital equity initiatives which are set to ramp up in Q1 of 2023. TEDD will be an integral partner in advocating for the traditionally underrepresented populations in Stevens County to ensure that programs and resources are available to residents in the area as part of the state's BEAD strategy.

Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County

Whatcom County Fire Chief Christopher Carleton FD5 asked if PointNet would consider free service to local hardship cases and PointNet has agreed to provide this on a confidential basis and the Fire Dept. will provide a list of those who may require special aid. FD5 indicated that a maximum of 15 such cases should be sufficient and PointNet has committed to support this provided that the Fire Dept. identify the parties and service addresses.

Yakima County

Prior to Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) our committed ISP was involved in Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program. The ISP gave 250 free internet accounts to homes during covid-19 in the Tieton and Naches area for students to do schoolwork. Later in process the schools paid for service at a discounted rate. There were no install fees and service charges. To this date these accounts are still active in ACP. Our committed ISP is also the K-20 internet service provider for the Tieton school district.

In this project area, 1,614 of the 5,303 households qualified for the ACP program are currently enrolled. While these numbers are higher than the national average enrollment of 17%, it still means that there are 3,689 homes in this project area that are qualified for the ACP program benefit that are not currently utilizing it.

Every subscriber will have no-cost access to an online subscription marketplace where residential and commercial subscribers can acquire open access broadband services from any qualitied ISP serving in this community. This user-friendly system, provided by COS systems, will create a

highly flexible system to allow subscribers to navigate between service offerings, price plans, and ISP's. This platform will enable subscribers who qualify to easily access the Affordable Connectivity Program and PUD sponsored Affordable Broadband program. This marketplace will also host other content, social services, digital equity, and other social services platforms usable by our rural community.

Our committed ISP works with the Tieton school district, sends mass communications that explain the ACP to enable enrollment, and provides tech support to help individuals with their computer needs. Forbes Mercy, the founder of our committed ISP, was also a co-founder in Yakima Networking, which provides free computer support for the committed ISP's internet subscribers.

Yakama Nation Library also has a program called Northstar Digital Literacy. The Program works on essential computer skills, essential software skills, and the use of technology in daily life. Also in Yakima County, the Yakima Valley Partners for Education from Heritage University (YVPE) has a Rural Accelerator Initiative Leadership Program (RALPH) that includes local school district leaders, community members, and Community–Based Organizations. One of the RALPH workgroup's focus areas is improving digital connectivity for students in Yakima County – they have been coordinating home connectivity for students and families through digital library subscriptions and internet and computer access. Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, a low-income medical clinic that serves all of Yakima County, has implemented a digital literacy program through their Community Health Worker program to help patients obtain smart phone, find options to support free minutes on their phones, and provide one-on-one education on using technology.

7.5 Stakeholder Organizations and the Covered Populations They Serve

The table below identifies organizations that participated in engagement activities in 2023. This list is not exhaustive as it relies on information participants provided at the time of the event.

Table 34: List of Organizations That Participated in Engagement Activities in 2023

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Adult education agency
Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges
Civil Rights Organization
Equity in Education Coalition
Latino Civic Alliance
Community anchor institution
Always Better Together LLC
ANSWERS Counseling
Asotin County Broadband Action Team; Asotin County Library
Asotin County Library
Cascade Wellness Clinic
Fort Vancouver Regional Libraries
Jefferson County Library District
Kitsap Regional Library
Liberty School District
Libraries of Stevens County
North Valley Hospital
Seattle Public Library
Sno-isle Libraries
Tacoma Public Library
Tri-State Memorial Hospital
Washington State Library
Whitman County Rural Library District
Willapa Behavioral Health & Wellness
Yakima Valley Libraries
County or municipal government
Adams County Development Council
Asotin County
Benton-Franklin Council of Governments
City of Anacortes
City of College Place
City of Oak Harbor
City of Ocean Shores
City of Poulsbo/ state Public Works Board
City of Seattle
City of Spokane

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
City of Tukwila
Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments
Grays Harbor County
Grays Harbor County Health Department
King County
Kitsap County
Lake Forest Park Citizens' Commission
Libraries of Stevens County
Lincoln County
Pierce County
Snohomish County
Spokane County
Town of Ione
Town of Wilkeson
Whatcom County
Yakima County
Economic development organization
CenterFuse
Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority
Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB)
Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments
Ferry County Sunrise
Key Peninsula Community Council
Lincoln County Economic Development Council
Mason County Economic Development Council
Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
North Olympic Development Council
Port District #2 of Wahkiakum County Washington
Port of Bellingham
Port of Clarkston
Port of Columbia
Port of Skagit
Port of Whitman County
Waitsburg Commercial Club
Yakima County Development Association
Faith-based organization
Sequim Trinity UMC
Higher education institution
Edmonds College
Olympic College
Washington State University

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Washington State University Extension
Washington State University Extension - Stevens County
Washington State University Extension - Wahkiakum County
Internet service provider
Advanced Stream
Astound
Avista Edge, Inc.
BROADLINC
CCI Systems
Charter Communications
Columbia Energy LLC dba Columbia iConnect
Comcast
Comcast Cable Communications, LLC
Commnet Rural America, LLC
Company
CresComm WiFi, LLC
Crown Castle
Declaration Networks Group, Inc.
Hood Canal Communications
Hoosier Fiber Networks
Inland Cellular
Inland Networks
Interisland.net / Computer Place
Intermax
Klick Networks, LLC
Link Oregon (dba for Oregon Fiber Partnership)
LocalTel Communications
Lumen
Lumen/CenturyLink
Monmouth Independence Networks
NoaNet
NoaNet (Northwest Open Access Network)
Petrichor Broadband
Ptera Inc
Ranier Connect
Rock Island Communications
Silver Star Telecom
TDS
TDS Telecom
T-Mobile
ToledoTel

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Velocity Communications Inc
Velocity Communications Inc.
Vyve Broadband
Washington Broadband
Whidbey Telecom
WIFIBER
Ziply Fiber
Key stakeholder partnership
Blue Mountain Action Council
Coastal Community Action Program
Foundation For Homeless & Poverty Management
Fresh Start Professional Services
Lewis County Broadband Action Team
Pend Oreille County BAT
Solid Ground
Sound Generations
Weld Seattle
Labor organization or union
Communications Workers of America
IEEE
Wireless Infrastructure Association
Local educational agency
Children's Life Inc.
Dieringer School District
Educational Service District 101
Kennewick School District
Mt Adams School District
Naselle-Grays River Valley Schools
Oak Harbor Public Schools
Onalaska School District #300
Seattle Public Schools
Sultan School District
The Little Farm Preschool
Nonprofit organization
American Indian Health Commission
Association of WA Cities
CAFE: Community for the Advancement of Family Education
Centro Americano
Coastal Community Action Program
Community Council
Community Health Plan of Washington

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Comunidades sin Fronteras WA
Filipino Community of Seattle
Financial Empowerment Network
Goodwill Connect
Goodwill Industries of the Columbia
Goodwill of the Olympics & Rainier Region
KNKX
Mt Baker Rim Community Club
National Digital Inclusion Alliance
NCW Tech Alliance
Pacific NorthWest Economic Region
Pacific Northwest Gigapop
Safe Homes
Seattle YMCA
Snowden Community Council
Technology Alliance
Underwood Park & Recreation District
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Walla Walla Community Council Broadband Study
Washington Independent Telecommunications Association
Washington Public Utility Districts Association
Washington State Horse Park
YMCA of Greater Seattle
Organization representing aging individuals (60+)
Sound Generations
Organization representing immigrants
Mother Africa
Other
ADTRAN
Amazon
Cisco
CPTS
Discovery Bay Resort (RV Park)
Discovery Bay Women's Club
E-Copernicus
eXp Realty
Flash Networks Group
Horrocks
JSI
Kitsap Bank
KLJ Engineering

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
LeadToResults, LLC
Learn Design Apply, Inc.
lightbox
LightRiver Technologies
Native Network Inc
Northwest Technologies
NT SYSTEMS
NTIA
Port of Bellingham
Port of Whitman County
Prysmian Group
Rain Forest Resort
Seabeck Systems
StateScoop
Strategic Alliance Consulting Inc.
Talitha Consults LLC
TEKsystems
Transportation and Warehouse
WBE Technologies LLC
Other - Organization representing underrepresented communities
Black Brilliance Research
Cambodian American Community Council of WA
Make Digital Equity
Public housing authority
Chicago Housing Authority
Seattle Housing Authority
Walla Walla Housing Authority
Public utility commission
Chelan County PUD
Grays Harbor PUD No. 1
Jefferson County PUD
Kitsap Public Utility District
Lewis County PUD
Mason PUD 3
Okanogan County Electric Cooperative
Pacific County PUD
Public Utility District No. 1 of Okanogan County
Snohomish County PUD
Washington Public Utility Districts Association (WPUDA)
Whatcom PUD
State agency

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Aging and Long-Term Support Administration
Attorney General of Washington
House of Representative
House of Representatives WA08
OSPI
Public Works Board
Washington Department of Commerce
Washington Department of Commerce (PWB and CERB)
Washington Department of Health
Washington Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington Employment Security Department
Washington Public Works Board - Broadband Program
Washington State Broadband Office
Washington State Department of Financial Institutions
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Washington State Department of Transportation
Washington State Office of Equity
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
Tribal government or organization
Chehalis Tribe
Colville Confederated Tribes
Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation
Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Hoh Indian Tribe
HU-Yakima Valley Partners for Education
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe
Lummi Indian Business Council
Lummi Nation
Makah Tribe
Nisqually Tribe
Quileute Tribe
Samish Indian Nation
Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe
Spokane Tribe
Spokane Tribe of Indians
Suquamish Tribe
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
T3 (Tribal Technology Training)
The Chehalis Tribe

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Tulalip Tribes of WA, Salish Networks
Workforce Development Organization
Seattle Jobs Initiative
SWB Technology LLC
T3 Tribal Technology Training
Washington Cradle to Career Advocacy Network
Workforce Central
Workforce Development Council of Seattle
WorkSource Walla Walla

7.6 List of Public Engagement Activities Contributing to Washington's Plan in 2023

Table 35: List of Engagement Activities in 2023

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
Interview with Public Works Board	03/16/23	Virtual	2	--
Interview with Department of Transportation	03/21/23	Virtual	3	--
Internet for All Kickoff	03/29/23	Virtual	330	All
Interview with City of Seattle & King County	04/04/23	Virtual	2	Individuals in covered households, Aging individuals, Individuals with disabilities, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group
Interview with Office of the Superintendent Public Instruction	04/13/23	Virtual	2	Individuals in covered households, Individuals with disabilities, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
Interview with Community Economic Revitalization Board	04/13/23	Virtual	1	--
City of Seattle Focus group (Spanish, Mixed Ages)	04/13/23	Virtual or in-person	5	Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
Interview with Equity in Education Coalition	04/18/23	Virtual	3	All
City of Seattle Focus group (Elders from Mexico)	04/19/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
Interview with Goodwill	04/20/23	Virtual	1	Individuals living in covered households, Aging individuals, Individuals with disabilities, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
City of Seattle Focus group (Vietnamese, Elders)	04/20/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
City of Seattle Focus group (Housing Insecure, Community Workers)	04/20/23	Virtual or in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
City of Seattle Focus group (Vietnamese, Housing Insecure Individuals)	04/24/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
City of Seattle Focus group (Veterans, Community Workers)	04/24/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Veterans
City of Seattle Focus group (Vietnamese, Community Workers)	04/25/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
City of Seattle Focus group (Housing Insecure, Mixed Ages)	04/25/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Aging individuals
City of Seattle Focus group (Veterans, Mixed Ages)	04/25/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging individuals, Veterans
City of Seattle Focus group (Vietnamese, Mixed Ages)	04/26/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
City of Seattle Focus group (Veterans, Housing Insecure Individuals)	04/27/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Veterans
City of Seattle Focus group (Spanish, Housing Insecure Individuals from Mexico)	05/01/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
City of Seattle Focus group (Cantonese, Elders)	05/01/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
City of Seattle Focus group (Cantonese, Mixed Ages)	05/01/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
ISP/PUD Focus group	05/03/23	128 N 2nd Street, Yakima, WA 98901	12	Individuals living in covered households, Aging individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals living in rural areas
City of Seattle Focus group (Community Workers from Mexico)	05/03/23	Virtual o/in-person	5	Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
Sunnyside School District Listening Session	05/04/23	1110 S. 6th Street, Sunnyside, WA. 98944	30	Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
Pahto Bus Outreach	05/04/23	Yakama Nation	20	Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
Moses Lake Focus group	05/05/23	124 E. Third Suite 205 Moses Lake, WA 98837	15	Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
Cinco de Mayo Festival	05/05/23	Downtown Sunnyside, WA	15	Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group,

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
Asotin Listening Session	05/09/23	2377 Appleside Blvd., Clarkston, WA 99403	5	Individuals living in rural areas
City of Seattle Focus group (Housing Insecure, Elders)	05/09/23	Virtual or in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Aging Individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
City of Seattle Focus group (Housing Insecure, Mixed Ages)	05/09/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Aging individuals
Spokane Listening Session	05/10/23	Spokane County Water Resource Center, 1004 N Freya St, Spokane, WA 99202	17	Individuals living in covered households, Aging individuals, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups, Individuals living in rural areas
City of Seattle Focus group (Veterans, Elders)	05/10/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Aging individuals, Veterans
Okanogan Listening Session	05/11/23	Public Utility District #1 Of Okanogan County, 1331 2nd Ave N, Okanogan WA 98840	15	Aging individuals, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
City of Seattle Focus group (Cantonese, Community Workers)	05/12/23	Virtual / in-person	5	Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
Interview with Stevens County Library	05/15/23	Virtual	1	Individuals living in rural areas

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
Royal City	05/19/23	117 Camelia St. NW Royal City, WA. 99357	14	Individuals in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
City of Seattle Focus group (Cantonese, Housing Insecure Individuals)	05/23/23	Virtual or in-person	5	Individuals living in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
Interview with Washington State Library	05/24/23	Virtual	1	All
Lower Columbia College Career Fair	05/25/23	Lower Columbia Community College, 1600 Maple St, Longview, WA 98632	18	Individuals in covered households, Individuals with disabilities, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group
Aberdeen Focus group	05/26/23	Grays Harbor County Public Health 2109 Sumner Ave. Aberdeen, WA 98520	8	Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group
Ocean Shores Focus group	05/26/23	Oceans Shore Lions Club, 832 Ocean Shores Blvd NW, Ocean Shores, WA 98569	9	Aging individuals
Interview with NoaNet	05/30/23	Virtual	1	
Forks Listening Session	05/30/23	481 S Forks Ave, Forks, WA 98331	5	

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
Prescott	05/30/23	1111 Fishhook Park Road Prescott, WA. 99348	16	Individuals in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
Port Angeles Food Bank	05/31/23	Port Angeles Food Bank, 632 N. Oakridge Dr. Port Angeles, WA 98362	83	Individuals in covered households, Aging individuals, Individuals with disabilities, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural area
Spokane	05/31/23	1502 N Monroe St, Spokane, WA. 99201	24	Individuals in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
Oak Harbor Listening Session	06/01/23	Oak Harbor Library, 1000 S.E. Regatta Drive, Oak Harbor, WA 98277	7	Individuals living in rural areas
Lynnwood Library Tabling Event	06/01/23	Lynnwood Library, 19200 44th Ave W, Lynnwood, WA 98036	21	Individuals in covered households, Aging individuals, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group
Tacoma Focus group	06/02/23	714 South 27th Street Tacoma, WA 98409	5	Individuals in covered households, Aging individuals, Veterans, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups
Interview with Washington Public Utilities District Association	06/02/23	Virtual	1	--
Interview with Department of Corrections	06/02/23	Virtual	3	All

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
Virtual Listening Session #1	06/07/23	Virtual	5	Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
Virtual Listening Session #2 (Workforce & Education Focused)	06/08/23	Virtual	97	Individuals living in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority groups, Individuals living in rural areas
Virtual Listening Session #3	06/09/23	Virtual	52	All
Walla Walla	06/15/23	209 E. Birch St, Walla Walla, WA 99362	19	Individuals in covered households, Individuals with language barriers, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas
White Salmon Focus group (Veterans Service Office)	06/21/23	Pioneer Center; 501 NE Washington St; White Salmon, WA 98672	9	Aging individuals, Veterans
Interview with Re-entry Council	06/26/23	Virtual	2	All
Interview with Ziply	06/26/23	Virtual	2	--
Interview with Washington Independent Telecommunications Association (WITA)	06/27/23	Virtual	1	--
Interview with Comcast	06/27/23	Virtual	3	--
Interview with Charter	06/28/23	Virtual	1	--
Interview with Department of Children, Youth & Families - Program Manager	07/07/23	Virtual	1	Individuals in covered households, Individuals from racial or ethnic minority group, Individuals living in rural areas, Individuals

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Number of People Engaged	Underrepresented Communities / Covered Populations
Focus group with formerly incarcerated individuals	07/10/23	Ezell's Famous Chicken, 1902 M.L.K. Jr Way, Tacoma, WA 98405	5	Incarcerated individuals
Focus group with individuals with disabilities	07/28/23	The Lighthouse for the Blind, 2501 S Plum St, Seattle, WA 98144	5	Individuals with a disability
Meeting with Recovery Career Services	08/14/23	Virtual	1	Incarcerated individuals

7.7 List of Tribal Public Engagement Activities Contributing to Washington's Plan in 2023

Table 36: List of Tribal Engagement Activities in 2023

Engagement Title	Engagement Type	Engagement Date	# Engaged
DTLL Workgroup	Virtual	03/07/23	5
DTLL Letter review	Virtual	03/15/23	4
Lower Elwha and BEAD/DE	Virtual	03/27/23	5
Broadband and Digital Equity and Jamestown S'Klallam	Virtual	03/28/23	4
Digital Equity and Tribal Broadband Leaders Network	Virtual	04/06/23	378
SC/SP Monthly BAT	Virtual	04/13/23	15
Colville Tribal Broadband Consultation	Virtual	05/03/23	N/A
ATNI Conference - Day 1	In-Person	05/08/23	12
ATNI Conference - Day 2	In-Person	05/09/23	200
ATNI Conference - Day 3	In-Person	05/10/23	15
Tribal Broadband at Spokane	Virtual	05/10/23	1
Tribal Broadband at Suquamish	Virtual	05/15/23	1
Tribal Broadband at Makah discussion	Virtual	05/22/23	1
Tribal Broadband at Shoalwater Bay Tribe	Virtual	05/23/23	1
Tribal Listening Session #1	Virtual	06/26/23	12
Tribal Listening Session #2	Virtual	06/2823	14
Tribal Listening Session #3	Virtual	06/29/23	8
FCC Tribal Workshop hosted by Lummi Nation	In-Person	07/12/23	N/A

7.8 Washington's Tribal Communications and Outreach Plan and Engagement Activities

Washington State Broadband Office

Tribal Broadband Engagement Plan

Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity Programs

Project Summary

The Washington State Broadband Office is charged with leading a statewide process to develop plans for **Internet for All in Washington**. This initiative will create strategies to ensure reliable, high-speed internet across the state of Washington, along with opportunities to invest in digital equity programs to make sure that in addition to internet access, people also have the tools and skillsets necessary to fully take advantage of the benefits that come with digital inclusion

The Five-Year Action Plan and the Digital Equity Act Plan will establish the state's eligibility for federal funding from the Biden-Harris administration's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This law delivers significant investments for the expansion of broadband access to help close the digital divide nationwide through the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program and Digital Equity (DE) Program.

Tribal Engagement Objective

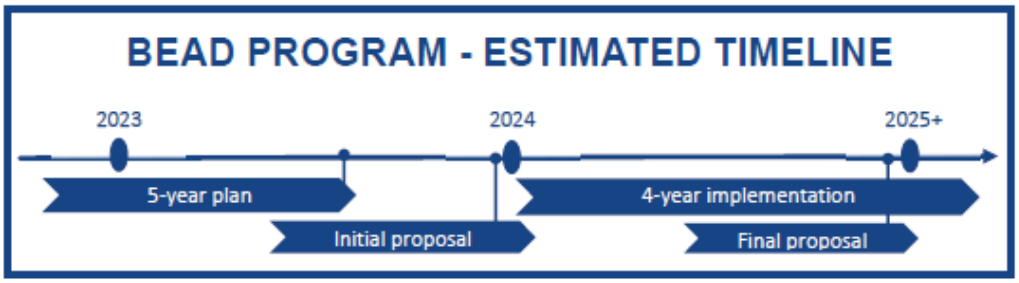
To confer with tribal governments at every step of the BEAD and Digital Equity planning process to ensure that tribes have numerous opportunities to provide input and feedback on the planning process, to shape what WSBO understands to be the unique needs of each tribal community/government, and any final documentation/plans that may impact their community, people or lands. The state of Washington is hopeful that all tribes in Washington will consult with the state as part of the planning process.

Approach

WSBO will embark on a tribe-informed engagement approach, which centers the expressed needs, resources and interests of each of the 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state. This framework is based on the understanding that tribal governments are subject matter experts in the needs of their communities and therefore should direct how they wish to engage with WSBO throughout the planning process.

Methods of engagement WSBO will offer include but are not limited to:

- Formal Government to Government Consultation
- Virtual and in-person listening sessions
- 1:1 conversations between subject matter experts



Tiered approach scaled to individual tribal needs

- **Listen** to tribes about how they would like lead their engagement in this process.
- **Learn** about tribal priorities around broadband and digital equity.
- **Engage** with tribes to achieve shared clarity regarding key milestones for the BEAD planning process and potential funding opportunities.
- **Communicate** with tribes regarding eligibility and requirements for tribes as sub-grantees and offer technical assistance as requested.
- **Share** resources throughout the planning process.
- **Consult** with tribes, tribal leadership and staff
- **Follow Up** with tribes to maintain communication once established
- **Document** engagement for accuracy and accountability throughout the planning process

Examples of activities WSBO has and will continue to engage in to maintain open communication with tribes:

- Dear Tribal Leader Letter announcing the BEAD and DE programs.
- Announcements sent to Tribal Leaders and SMEs sharing relevant resources regarding the BEAD and DE Programs.
- WSBO attendance at regional conferences where tribal leaders will be in attendance such as ATNI and COMTAC.
- Virtual and in-person listening sessions
- Regional group listening sessions
- Individual information sessions/meetings

Contact information summary:

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