Washington State Department of Commerce

INTERNET FOR ALL IN WASHINGTON

Digital Equity Plan

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Key Report Abbreviations

ACP	Affordable Connectivity Program
ACS	American Community Survey
ATNI	Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians
BAT	Broadband Action Team
BEAD	Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment
CAAA	Washington State Commission on African American Affairs
CAI	Community Anchor Institution
CAP	Community Action Plan
CAPAA	Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA)
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CHA	Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Commerce	Washington State Department of Commerce
DCYF	Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families
DEU	Digital Equity Unit
DOC	Washington State Department of Corrections
DOH	Washington State Department of Health
DSHS	Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
DSL	Digital Subscriber Line
ESD	Washington State Employment Security Department
ESSHB	Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
Fiscal Year	FY
Gbps	Gigabit per second
HB	House Bill
IFA	Internet for All
ISPs	Internet Service Providers
IT	Information Technology
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
Mbps	Megabit per second

NTIA	National Telecommunications and Information Administration
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity
OSPI	Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
PUD	Public Utility District
PUMS	Public Use Microdata Sample
SB	Senate Bill
SBCTC	Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
WDVA	Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs
Workforce Board	Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
WSBO	Washington State Broadband Office
WSU	Washington State University

Definition of Key Terms

Accessibility: In the context of access to services for individuals with disabilities, "Accessible" means a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally effective and equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.[1] Accessibility is also used in reference to the availability of multilingual content for individuals with language barriers as relates to language access.

Broadband: The term broadband commonly refers to high-speed internet access that is always on and faster than traditional dial-up access. For the Federal Communications Commission, broadband capability requires consumers to have access to actual download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) and actual upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps.[2]

Broadband Access: The availability of high-speed, reliable internet and related equipment, including having internet connections and technology at home or in community institutions, such as free public Wi-Fi or public computer centers.[3]

Broadband Adoption: 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.[4]

Broadband Affordability: Affordability refers to the ability to afford the costs associated with accessing the internet, including for service, devices, and fees.

Broadband Availability: Sufficient infrastructure and coverage to deliver reliable, high-speed wired or wireless broadband services and technology tools.

Community Anchor Institutions: An entity such as a school, library, health clinic, health center, hospital or other medical provider, public safety entity, institution of higher education, public housing organization, or community support organization that facilitates greater use of broadband service by vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, low-income individuals, unemployed individuals, children, the incarcerated, and aged individuals. Additionally, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) allows the state to propose additional types of institutions that should qualify as community anchor institutions. The state of Washington is currently finalizing a list of institutions to submit to the NTIA as part of its Initial Proposal. *(NOFO Section I.C.f)*[5]

Covered Household: As defined in the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) Digital Equity Planning Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity (DE NOFO) The term "covered household" means a household, the income of which for the most

[1] Office for Civil Rights Resolution agreements (2014) definition from South Carolina Technical College System, University of Cincinnati and Youngstown State cited by University of Washington, Accessible Technology website. Accessed at: https://www.washington.edu/accesstech/policy-resources/resolution-agreements-and-lawsuits/#UC-YSU
[2] NTIA (2016), Broadband Glossary. Accessed at: BroadbandUSA: Connecting America's Communities (doc.gov)
[3] NTIA (n.d.), "What does Digital Inclusion mean?". Accessed at: What does Digital Inclusion mean? | BroadbandUSA (doc.gov)
[4] Digital Equity Act of 2021 (2021). Accessed at: 47 USC Ch. 16: BROADBAND ACCESS (house.gov)
[5] NTIA (2022), BEAD NOFO. Accessed at: BEAD NOFO.pdf (doc.gov)

recently completed year is not more than 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level, as determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census.[6]

Covered Population/Underrepresented Communities: "Covered Population" describes the eight population groups NTIA identified as underrepresented communities: low-income households; aging individuals; incarcerated individuals; veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who have limited English proficiency 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. *(NOFO Section I.C.aa)*

Cybersecurity: Cybersecurity is how individuals and organizations reduced the risk of being affected by cybercrime. A core function is to protect the devices used (smartphones, laptops, tablets, and computers, etc.), and the services accessed online both at home and in the workplace from theft, damage, or fraudulent uses.[7]

Digital Equity: The condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States.[8]

Digital Inclusion: As defined in the Digital Equity Planning Grant NOFO The term "digital inclusion" means: (1) The activities that are necessary to ensure that all individuals in the United States have access to, and the use of, affordable information and communication technologies, such as—(a) Reliable fixed and wireless broadband internet service; (b) Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; and (c) Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration; and (2) Includes—(a) Obtaining access to digital literacy training; (b) The provision of quality technical support; and (c) Obtaining basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity.[9]

Digital Literacy: The skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information.[10]

Digital Navigation: The National Digital Inclusion Alliance defines digital navigators as trusted guides who assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

Digital Skills: Any skills related to operating digital devices or taking advantage of digital resources.

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[6] NTIA (2022). State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program NOFO. Accessed at: https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf
[7] National Cyber Security Centre (n.d.). Information for Individuals & families. Accessed at: https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/information-for/individuals-families#:~:text=Cyber%20security%20is%20the%20means,work%20%2D%20from%20theft%20or%20damage
[8] 47 U.S. Code § 1721 – Definitions (2021). Accessed at: https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/47/1721
[9] Same as footnote 6
[10] Same as footnote 8

Internet Service Provider (ISP): An ISP is an organization that provides services for accessing, using, managing, or participating on the internet. ISPs can be organized in various forms, such as commercial, community owned, non-profit, or otherwise privately owned.

Underserved Location: An underserved location is defined as a broadband-serviceable location that is (a) not an unserved location, and (b) that the Broadband DATA Maps show as lacking access to Reliable Broadband Service offered with - (i) a speed of not less than 100 Mbps for downloads; and (ii) a speed of not less than 20 Mbps for uploads; and (iii) latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds. *(NOFO Section I.C.bb)*.

Unserved Location: An unserved location is defined as a broadband-serviceable location that the Broadband DATA Maps show as (a) having no access to broadband service, or (b) lacking access to Reliable Broadband Service offered with – (i) a speed of not less than 25 Mbps for downloads; and (ii) a speed of not less than 3 Mbps for uploads; and (iii) latency less than or equal to 100 milliseconds. *(NOFO Section I.C.dd)*.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 to bring broadband services and digital skills to all. 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.[11] Washington state has also been at the forefront of convening an array of partners to solve major issues.

In 2019, the Washington State Legislature established the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) and tasked it with promoting broadband access and achieving download/upload speed goals for residences, businesses, and communities.[12] The WSBO, established within the Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce), continues to lead activities that encourage, foster, develop, and improve affordable broadband connectivity and support digital equity initiatives. Activities include funding grants and programs such as the Digital Navigator Program, the Broadband Action Teams (BATs), State Broadband Matching Grants, and creating a Drive-in Wi-Fi Hotspot Finder during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Commerce celebrates the success of the work conducted through the Digital Navigator Program and investments in more than 30 organizations statewide.[13] The WSBO has supported organizations leading the charge towards increasing digital device distribution, educational services, navigation services, and access to broadband services through enrollment programs or free Wi-Fi locations.

To continue that legacy, the Washington State Legislature enacted legislation in 2022 that solidifies digital equity into the framework of Washington's government by passing a state Digital Equity Act (Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill (ESSHB) 1723). The legislation established a Digital Equity Forum and included provisions related to promoting digital equity among unserved and underserved communities. Legislation (ESSHB 1336 and Senate Bill (SB) 5383) have also removed certain barriers to getting people connected. One example of this is allowing public entities to provide retail broadband services directly to end users. Another initiative to promote digital equity was the creation of Commerce's Digital Equity Unit (DEU). The DEU's mission is to advance digital inclusion for all Washington residents so all can participate and collaborate online and thrive in today's global society. The Digital Navigator Program is housed within the DEU. Through close collaboration, the WSBO and the DEU will work together to achieve the goals outlined in this Digital Equity Plan.

The recent Digital Navigator Program (DNP) grant cycle for fiscal years 2024-2025 awarded $29 million to three consortiums to provide digital navigation services across Washington state. The

[11] State Digital Equity Scorecard (2022). Accessed at: https://state-scorecard.digitalinclusion.org/scorecard/by_state/WA
[12] Washington State Legislature (2019), RCW 43.330.532. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532
[13] Washington State Department of Commerce (2023), Digital Navigator Program. Accessed at: Digital Navigator Program – Washington State Department of Commerce

DNP received 26 applications requesting more than $115 million, underscoring the need to connect more residents to the internet and to provide them with the skills needed to participate fully in our digitally connected society.[14] However, there is still significant work remaining, which will require more funding than is currently available to improve digital equity outcomes in the state.

A range of digital equity assets and champions has developed from organizations that understand the advantages of connectivity for all members of society in Washington state. This ranges from local libraries applying for funding to provide low-income families with subsidized internet connection plans, to one-one technology programs run by school districts, to organizations empowering their communities by providing digital literacy workshops, and more. Washington state has seen enormous grassroots momentum in providing people with the devices, skills, and internet connection they need to access the full benefits of the digital world. 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 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 hundreds of thousands of locations in Washington that lack broadband service.[15] Disparities exist throughout the state related to access to the internet. Limited or no access can be caused by 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, the lack of digital literacy, or a combination of barriers prohibiting certain individuals from achieving digital access. This Digital Equity Plan outlines a roadmap to catalyze the work needed to reduce the digital divide in Washington. To fully bridge the digital divide, there is a need for long-term support across organizations in Washington. This can look like statewide partnerships to embed digital equity into the delivery of all state-provided services, legislative support to create avenues for sustainable funding for digital equity efforts, and dedication from all digital equity champions to collaborate and build together towards an inclusive future where all can benefit from the internet.

[14] Department of Commerce (2023). Accessed at: State grants fund digital navigation services to help new internet users get online - Washington State Department of Commerce

[15] Unserved and underserved location analysis from National Broadband Availability Map data updated 01/23/24 indicates over 218,000 unserved locations and over 74,000 underserved locations. Note: These numbers are subject to change until the deduplication and Challenge Process described in Washington State's Initial Proposal Volume II are completed.

To hear directly from communities on the barriers and needs related to accessing, affording, and adopting broadband, the WSBO and its engagement partners conducted public engagement activities throughout Washington state. Although additional outreach is still needed, the WSBO hosted more than 30 events and engaged over 4,000 Washington residents between the summer of 2022 and January 2024. While this number is not statistically representative of Washington state's entire population, the WSBO's outreach was intentional about including 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, as well as virtually, to allow for various avenues for engagement.

Public engagement

Between 2022 and 2024, over 4,000 Washington residents had the chance to share their perspectives and stories on digital equity challenges and opportunities facing their communities. These engagement events took place both virtually and in person. Participants represented organizations and individuals from every covered population.

The WSBO also worked with community-based organizations, such as 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 Washington State's ESSHB 1723, public engagement was tailored to reach historically unserved and underserved communities, or "covered populations."[16] Since covered populations often face numerous compounding barriers to accessing the internet, the WSBO used their stories to center the development of this Digital Equity Plan. Based on the insights gathered from the WSBO's public engagement, this Digital Equity Plan categorizes Washington-specific barriers as either being a "systemic barrier" that is beyond the control of the individual and which may affect all individuals, or a covered-population-specific-barrier faced most prevalently by individuals who self-identify as part of a covered population. For example, 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

[16] 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. Washington state includes two additional categories: 1) Individuals experiencing housing instability and 2) Youth and children in foster care.

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 strive to use outreach methods that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and tailored to the communities they intend to engage. By being sensitive to competing priorities, providing more sessions at different times of the day, joining established community gathering events, and using trusted avenues of communication, the WSBO intends to continue incorporating the diverse voices of Washingtonians. Ongoing public engagement, building more partnerships, and receiving suggestions on ways to improve are important to the WSBO. 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."
>
> -Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1723 (Digital Equity Act)

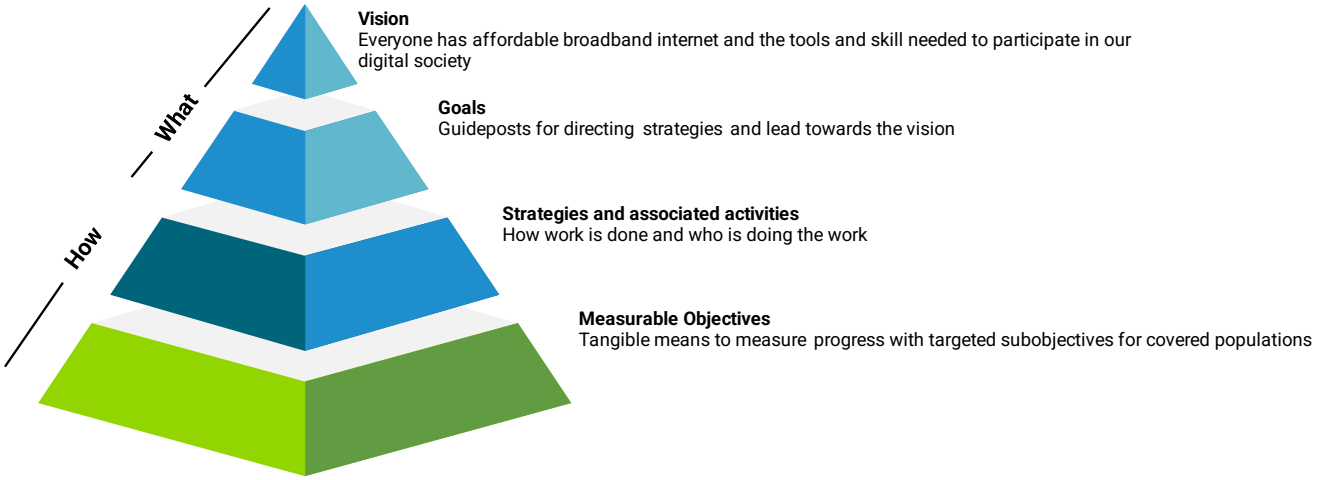
1.2 *Charting a Course to Reach Our Digital Equity Goals*

While there remain multiple barriers to increasing 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 has been adopted in this document:

> *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. **Advance sustainability** of digital equity programs.

Eliminate Barriers	Empower Residents	Advance Sustainability
Provide Washington residents with infrastructure, devices, and tools, to access 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 six 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 approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability.
3. Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity.
4. Provide services that increase digital literacy.
5. Promote practices and leverage tools to enable online privacy and security.
6. Embed digital equity considerations into larger statewide efforts to advance the sustainability of this work.

Strategies for the state of Washington have been developed based on their ability to address gaps in existing digital inclusion efforts, and to align with preestablished statewide priorities to further 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 2.3** and **Section 5.1**. **Chapter 5** will also dive into the ways Washington will measure success, mitigate risks, and advance sustainability of digital equity related services in the long term. A summary is provided below with strategies mapped to the goal that they support.

Table 1: Summary of Strategies, Universal 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. Advance sustainability of digital equity programs.

STRATEGIES & OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES
Strategy 1: Expand broadband availability and increase affordability • **Universal Objective 1:** All Washingtonians have the opportunity to access and afford broadband service	• 1.1: Coordinate with state Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Program to align with digital equity goals • 1.2: Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in low-cost and subsidized broadband service for low-income communities • 1.3: Utilize Washington state's Digital Equity Dashboard to track progress in broadband services for covered populations • 1.4: Support Washington community anchor institutions (CAIs) to improve and increase the number of free public Wi-Fi locations • 1.5: Solicit innovative solutions that can increase broadband affordability and adoption among hard-to-reach covered populations or subgroups
Strategy 2: Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability • **Universal Objective 2:** All Washingtonians can access and afford the devices needed to maintain digital connectivity	• 2.1: Partner with internet service providers (ISPs), CAIs, and device distributors to develop awareness campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile hotspots, and free, subsidized, or low-cost device programs • 2.2: Develop innovative programs like statewide device repair, refurbishment, reuse, and recycling programs to increase device affordability and availability
Strategy 3: Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity • **Universal Objective 3**: Support inclusive practices that allow access to digital services for everyone	• 3.1: Partner with trusted messenger programs and organizations to share information about digital assistance and online accessibility with covered populations
Strategy 4: Provide services that increase digital literacy • **Universal Objective 4:** All Washingtonians have opportunities to acquire the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity activities	• 4.1: Build upon lessons learned through the Washington State Digital Navigator Program and statewide organizations that offer digital navigation, digital literacy, or digital skill trainings to expand programs designed to address unique needs of covered populations • 4.2: Leverage existing programs to expand community partnerships that provide increased knowledge and skills enabling covered populations to participate in changing workforce and societal 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 • 4.4: Develop a standardized publicly available digital skill training curriculum and resources
Strategy 5: Promote practices and leverage tools to enable online privacy and security • **Universal Objective 5**: Advance measures that keep Washingtonians safe and protected online from cyber threats	• 5.1: Leverage the Digital Navigator Program and other digital skills education providers to conduct outreach and engagement, provide in-person trainings, and tools and educational resources related to online privacy and cybersecurity • 5.2: Support the Statewide Cybersecurity Strategy to protect data and privacy of covered populations online • 5.3: Partner with ISPs to promote cybersecurity education
Strategy 6: Embed digital equity considerations into larger statewide efforts to advance the sustainability of this work • **Universal Objective 6**: Build partnerships with tribal governments, state agencies, CBOs, businesses, and other digital equity focused organizations to sustain digital equity work	• 6.1: Work with partners to explore sustainable funding mechanisms that allow more state agencies, CAIs, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to adopt digital equity programs • 6.2: Support collective impact model for reducing digital illiteracy and to build accessible on-ramps to IT-related career paths

OUTCOME AREAS

Health | Education | Economic | Civic & Social Engagement | Essential Services

1.2.3 Measuring success

When possible, this Digital Equity Plan will determine current statewide baselines as well as baselines for each covered population to serve as a starting point for describing the current state of digital equity across Washington. Baseline data will come from a variety of publicly available sources, such as the Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) from the American Community Survey (ACS), data from the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), and state agency data sources. As strategies are implemented, it will be important to measure progress on an annual basis over the course of the next five years.

To achieve the three goals listed above, this Digital Equity Plan includes "universal" objectives for all Washingtonians. Universal objectives map to high-level goals established to achieve connectivity and its associated benefits for all. Under the universal objectives, Sub-objectives will be designed for covered populations in relation to how these groups are situated within the digital divide.[17] An example of a universal objective is as follows:

"Enabling all Washingtonians to have the opportunity to access and afford broadband services."

While a sub-objective for a specific covered population is as follows:

"Increase the percentage of aging individuals living on a fixed income who have broadband service."

The universal objectives are intended to establish a baseline of digital inclusion benefits for all Washingtonians. Sub-objectives will be focused based on how people are situated differently within structures, culture, across geographies and how that may affect access to certain benefits, such as the ability to access affordable broadband services or the ability to know how to use a digital device.[18]

The Digital Equity Plan will identify sub-objectives for populations where both baseline quantitative data and public engagement qualitative data reflect the largest disparities. This approach will benefit the most covered populations in Washington while continuing to strive for universal access for all. Further details on associated key performance indicators for all Sub-objectives are provided in **Chapter 2** of this Plan.

[17] Based on NTIA feedback in an early review of the Digital Equity Plan, universal objectives include subobjectives that are specific to covered populations to meet DE NOFO compliance requirements.

[18] Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley (2019). [18] To develop goals, strategies, objectives, and subobjectives, concepts and language were referenced from the "Targeted Universalism" framework developed by John A. Powell of the Othering & Belonging Institute, but primarily as a conceptual framework rather than a strict adherence to methodology. The primary concept of "setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals" and developing strategies to achieve those goals "based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies" was referenced, where appropriate Accessed at: https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeted-universalism

1.3 *What Happens Next*

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, the 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 members, when possible, in facilitating ongoing conversations and holistic, considerate, inclusive input gathering.[19]

Implementation of several strategies identified in **Chapter 5** is already underway and will be coordinated with BEAD program-related activities. In collaboration with the WSBO, the DEU received $32.8 million in fiscal year (FY) 2023 to fund the Digital Navigator Program. This state funding allowed the WSBO and DEU to contract with 32 partners to provide digital navigation services. This resulted in over 152,000 individuals served in the general Digital Navigator Program and nearly 3,000 individuals served through dedicated funding for the Digital Navigator Re-Entry Program.[20] After the 2023 legislative session, digital navigation funding dropped to $15 million for FY 2024 and $15 million for FY 2025. In recognition of this funding reduction from the previous FY 2023 and the positive impact of digital navigation programs, the WSBO and DEU have requested additional digital navigation funding for FY 2025. However, any additional funding for the digital navigation program will only be determined based on the outcome of the current legislative session, which ends March 7, 2024.

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 subscribe for updates through the Internet for All in Washington website, to contact the office through the Internet for All email inbox (InternetforAll@Commerce.wa.gov), or through mail sent to:

Department of Commerce

Washington State Broadband Office

P.O. Box 42525

Olympia, WA 98504-2525.

[19] The WSBO will follow community compensation guidelines outlined by the Office of Equity.
[20] Digital Navigator Program and Funding Review (2023). Accessed at: commerce.wa.gov

2. INTRODUCTION & VISION FOR DIGITAL EQUITY

Washington's Digital Equity Plan was created to design strategies that respond to the needs of diverse communities and bridge the digital divide across the state. While resources such as libraries and citywide technology needs assessments 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 a quickly changing digital environment.[21] While many communities were able to transition work, education, or other social needs online, other communities were excluded and unable to participate in digital society due to systemic challenges such as lack of adequate infrastructure or related to difficulties utilizing technology. This Digital Equity 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*

In 2019, state legislation established the WSBO with the purpose to promote, develop and improve the affordability and quality of internet connectivity. This will support an increase in services for residents, businesses, and communities across the state.[22] Through initiatives such as the Digital Equity Unit's (DEU's) Digital Navigator Program, the WSBO has also tapped into 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 from 2022 through 2024, 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 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.
- **Advancing sustainability:** Establish and build partnerships across Washington state to deliver and sustain broadband service and support programs for learning and engaging in civil society.

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

These goals will contextualize the strategies created by the state to reduce the digital divide in Washington.

This Digital Equity Plan focuses on strategies that align with Washington's vision for digital equity, pulling from widely accepted pillars of broadband and digital equity: availability, affordability, adoption.

- **Availability**: Sufficient infrastructure, devices, 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.

2.2 *Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes*

This Digital Equity Plan is intended 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 and the Washington State Legislature, in addition to regional, local, and tribal near-term and long-term objectives.

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."[23] To build toward this vision, in 2013 Governor Inslee proposed five priority goals for the state: (1) World-Class Education; (2) Prosperous Economy; (3) Sustainable Energy and a Clean Environment; (4) Healthy and Safe Communities; and (5) Effective, Efficient, and Accountable Government.[24]

These five priority goals have shaped the areas where the state decides to invest and has directly influenced the expedited need for broadband infrastructure and digital skills. 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.[25] For example, to achieve a world-class education, Washingtonians should have access to online schooling and online educational resources. These online resources can prepare them to succeed professionally in their careers, socially in the community, and personally as lifelong learners. Next, a prosperous, modern economy relies on technological advancement, innovation, and a trained workforce. These are achievable only through the expansion of broadband access and the skills and knowledge to benefit from a digital society. Additionally, the health of Washingtonians can be improved through the expansion of telehealth services and access to online medical or wellness resources. Being

[23] 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

[24] 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

[25] 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

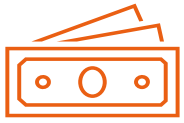
able to utilize the benefits that come from internet connectivity will advance the state's five priority goals that drive decisions and investment.

WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

The Washington State Legislature highlighted the importance of increasing broadband access and digital equity in several ways:[26]

Accessing 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.

Investing from the telecommunications industry and the public sector, as well as policies and programs adopted to provide affordable broadband services throughout the state, 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.

The Washington State Legislature consequently established the WSBO to "encourage, foster, develop, and improve affordable, quality broadband within the state," to help with job creation, promote innovation, improve economic vitality, and expand markets for Washington

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

businesses.[27] Overall, the WSBO is dedicated to improving broadband access for unserved and underserved communities and populations, working towards equitable development by bridging the digital divide.[28]

The WSBO's main objectives are twofold: to support affordable and reliable high-speed internet access for Washington residents and to strategically implement collaborative actions to promote digital inclusion through affordable access, internet connectivity, adoption, and digital skill building. By 2026, Washington state hopes to achieve 1/1 gigabit per second (Gbps) speed services for all community anchor institutions. By 2028, the goal is to achieve 150/150 megabits per second (Mbps) for all residents and businesses.[29]

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 Digital Equity Forum was established in the 2021 Operating Budget in close partnership between the WSBO and the Office of Equity to advance digital connectivity in Washington.[30] To date, the Digital Equity Forum has engaged with approximately 3,000 Washington residents. This has been accomplished by holding public meetings and facilitating surveys, listening sessions, and focus groups to hear from local communities and understand their lived experiences with digital equity barriers.

The Digital Equity Forum includes representation from tribal governments, state agencies, and underserved communities, including historically disadvantaged communities.[31] Its purpose is to identify opportunities to advance digital connectivity for underserved communities, including historically disadvantaged communities throughout Washington state.[32] The Digital Equity Forum's efforts are driven by their established commitment to accomplish the WSBO's state internet connectivity goals by:

- Strengthening public-private partnerships
- Soliciting public input through public hearings or informational sessions
- Working to increase collaboration and communication between local, state, tribal and federal government and agencies
- Recommending reforms to universal service mechanisms[33]

[27] RCW 43.330.532 (2021). Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532
[28] Washington state Broadband Office (2023). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/
[29] RCW 43.330.536 (2019). Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.536
[30] Washington State Department of Commerce (2023). Digital Equity Forum Report: Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/
[31] Digital Equity Forum (2023). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-equity-forum/
[32] Note that the NTIA definition of "Covered Populations" overlaps with the state's definition of "underserved populations" established in HB1723, but there are some differences.
[33] Digital Equity Forum (2023). Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/digital-equity-forum/

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 Digital Equity Forum and other partners.

2.2.1 Inclusion of Community Action Plans

Washington state proactively considered the importance of integrating local efforts into statewide planning for the Digital Equity Plan. The state partnered with Washington State University (WSU)-Extension to provide technical assistance and up to $59,000 in funding to local Broadband Action Teams (BATs) to support the creation of county-level and tribal digital equity plans, called "Community Action Plans" (CAPs). These BATs were comprised of a variety of members including local governments, county representatives, educational institutions, CBOs, PUDs, and numerous other organizations. Each group was charged with creating their own, unique Community Action Plan. This resulted in all 39 counties and 12 of 29 federally recognized tribes developing 51 plans to showcase the unique needs of their communities and solutions to achieve digital equity. In addition to the 12 tribes that prepared their own CAPs, four tribes partnered with neighboring counties. In total, 16 tribes participated. The CAPs were developed to support their communities in defining and leading the solutions pathway to address their broadband and digital equity gaps. However, these plans have also informed the statewide Digital Equity Plan. They have provided 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 Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity Planning

The state will work to coordinate activities described in this Digital Equity Plan with activities funded through BEAD and other digital equity funding sources. 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. The WSBO will also leverage existing relationships among the Digital Equity Forum, regional networks, and organizations listed in **Section 3.1**.[34]

Washington state has been cultivating partnerships and investing state funding towards advancing digital inclusion activities to provide Washingtonians with the information technology capacity needed for full participation in the digital society and economy. As an example, in fiscal year (FY) 2023, Washington State Legislature allocated $4 million for the development of BATs for counties and tribes. The legislature also provided an additional $4 million for the development of CAPs by BATs as described in **Section 3.1.2**.

To increase digital equity, the WSBO worked with community organizations and libraries across the state to implement a Digital Navigator Program. The Program provides direct assistance to those with the greatest need in terms of access to and knowledge of how to use technology

[34] This list is not meant to be exhaustive and will need to be updated over time as new relationships, digital equity assets, and organizations arise.

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." Digital navigators also 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. Digital Navigation efforts funded by Washington received $7.4 million in FY 2022. In FY 2023, Digital Navigation Programs received $32.8 million in funding. After the 2023 legislative session, digital navigation funding dropped to $15 million for FY 2024 and $15 million for FY 2025. In recognition of this funding reduction and the positive impact of Digital Navigation Programs, the WSBO and the DEU have requested additional digital navigation funding for FY 2025. However, any additional funding for the Digital Navigation Program will be determined based on the outcome of the current legislative session, which ends March 7, 2024.

In additional to the state Digital Navigator Program, libraries, community and technical colleges, and community-based organizations have been providing essential digital literacy and digital training to residents. In rural areas, they are often the only service or training provider. Community and technical colleges – in partnership with community-based organizations – also integrate digital skills training within basic education and English language acquisition classes for adults and workforce training programs.

These pre-existing digital inclusion activities have contributed to the development of both this Digital Equity Plan and the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan, demonstrating the interdependence of digital equity and broadband expansion in Washington. With this linkage, the state is committed to supporting access to sustainable high-speed internet to all residents, businesses, and communities. However, additional funding for digital literacy and skills programs is needed to increase the number of residents and businesses that can be served and improve overall digital skill levels for Washingtonians.

As the state prepares to implement the BEAD Program to support universal access, there are direct linkages between the goals of the BEAD and Digital Equity Capacity Grants. The BEAD Initial Proposal Volume II emphasizes the importance of affordability of service and rewards BEAD applicants that support digital inclusion efforts. Applicants to the BEAD Program will be awarded points for supporting internet adoption and digital navigation services. Additionally, if selected, BEAD subgrantees will need to demonstrate their commitment to offering a low-cost service plan and middle-class affordability strategies.

As exemplified by Washington state's digital inclusion programming, community partnerships, and ongoing public engagement efforts, the state views digital equity as an essential component of universal access. In short, Washington seeks to increase broadband access for speed, reliability, and availability, while simultaneously increasing affordability, adoption, and digital skills training for covered and underserved populations. Although as noted, the demand for digital inclusion services is greater than the funding currently available.[35]

[35] Washington State Department of Commerce (2022). "State grants fund digital navigation services to help new internet users get online." Accessed at: commerce.wa.gov

To embed digital equity work into other state agency services, the WSBO's relationship building is another crucial aspect of coordination between digital equity planning, the BEAD Program, and other state activities. This is described further in **Section 5.1.6**. Maintaining open lines of communication with the organizations involved in statewide digital equity efforts will be an important aspect of the WSBO's funding coordination and sustainability strategy. The Digital Equity Plan will also be coordinated with broader statewide efforts and goals. These include economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes; educational outcomes; health outcomes; civic and social engagement; and the delivery of essential services.

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

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Washington Workforce Association is the membership organization for the local workforce development boards of Washington state. It provides resources and coordination between local boards. Washington state has 12 local workforce development boards, shown in **Map 1**. These boards 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.[36] Local workforce development boards also work to identify trends in the labor market to provide Washingtonians with information on career pathways and investments to maximize long-term equitable and successful outcomes.[37]

Some local boards have explicit commitments to racial equity and the provision of culturally competent and linguistically appropriate services. These boards place an emphasis on advancing digital equity so that participants have access to internet-enabled devices, broadband, and digital literacy training.[38] Access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband is crucial to Washington's capacity to increase wages, enhance productivity, and develop new and skilled talent. The strategies in this Digital Equity Plan align with Washington Workforce Association activities to improve the outcomes of efforts generated by the local boards. The strategies include increasing access to devices across underserved populations, increasing digital skills of Washington's current and future workforce, and increasing the accessibility of state resources to potential laborers.

Local boards, in collaboration with the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD), the Governor's Office and Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (the Workforce Board) created an ongoing, adaptable $13.8 million fund called the Economic Security for All Expansion.[39] This 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 and reduction efforts. Investment in digital skills training can support the overall objectives, particularly in relation to expanding skills-based training.

[36] Washington Workforce Association (2023), Local Workforce Development Boards. Accessed at: https://washingtonworkforce.org/lwdb-directory/
[37] Ibid.
[38] Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County (n.d.) Accessed at: https://www.seakingwdc.org/
[39] Washington Workforce Association (2023), Building Pathways, Making an Impact. Accessed at: Building Pathways, Making an Impact - Washington Workforce Association

Map 1: Washington State Local Workforce Development Boards[40]

The Workforce Board spearheads economic and workforce development and is the state workforce development board under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.[41] It is Washington's principal workforce policy advisor, responsible for the state's workforce development system and is the designated oversight entity for federally funded Career and Technical Education. It also serves as a regulator of private career schools and veteran education programs. The Workforce Board's unique board composition – one-third business, one-third workers, and one-third government – means that business and labor are at the same table, supplying a real-world view of workforce challenges and opportunities.[42]

The Workforce Board's workforce system helps Washington residents find jobs, re-enter the workforce, or move ahead in their current careers.[43] Additionally, the Workforce Board drafted and published Washington's four-year strategy for further advancing and strengthening their workforce development system. Washington's Talent and Prosperity for All (TAP) plan encompasses a wide range of employment, education, training, and related service. TAP also provides support to help workers secure and retain good jobs while providing businesses with skilled workers they need to economically grow within a global economy.[44] TAP's guiding principles for 2024–2028 are:

- Close economic disparities for marginalized populations

[40] Washington Workforce Association (2023), Find A Local Workforce Development Board in Your Area. Accessed at: https://washingtonworkforce.org/lwdb-directory/ Note: Northwest Workforce Council is not a member of Washington Workforce Association.
[41] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023), Homepage. Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/
[42] Ibid.
[43] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023), Workforce System at a Glance. Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/planning-programs/washington-workforce-system/
[44] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023), State Workforce Plan: Talent and Prosperity for All (TAP). Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/planning-programs/washington-state-workforce-plan/

- Comprehensive support for individuals with barriers to employment
- System-wide performance metrics and accountability[45]

The Workforce Board'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 support guiding principles related to improving equitable access to opportunities and strategic priorities through the expansion of broadband infrastructure across the state and digital navigation services. The planning process for digital equity in Washington has focused on expanding access and eliminating barriers for covered populations. When access is available and barriers eliminated, online resources, educational prospects, and improved opportunities for economic success and stability are equitably obtainable for underserved individuals.

Another workforce and education focused organization is the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). SBCTC is a nine-member, governor-appointed board responsible for administering the Community and Technical College Act.[46] The Community and Technical College Act created an independent system of affordable colleges to serve all Washingtonians regardless of their background or experience. The community and technical colleges emphasize basic skills and literacy education, occupational education, and technical training to prepare students for careers in a competitive workforce.[47] Under the SBCTC's guidance and support, the state's 34 public community and technical colleges, and funded community-based partners, offer a myriad of programs and courses for adult learners, including Adult Basic Education classes, High School Completion through GED preparation and High School+ classes, Career Exploration and Launch classes, English Language Acquisition classes, and Integrated Basic Education and Training classes. All these programs provide digital skills training for adult learners.

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 degrees, and applied baccalaureate degrees. In addition to the robust education programming that the public community and technical colleges offer, the SBCTC's Committee for Accessible Technology Oversight also provides digital accessibility training for all colleges.

In support of TAP's strategic priorities, the Workforce Board, SBCTC, ESD, Commerce, and nonprofit organizations are partnering to support a $20.8 million decision package.[48] The decision package requests funding from the state legislature to invest in digital literacy and

[45] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023), WA State Workforce Plan: TAP one pager. Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TAP-Plan-one-pager-1.pdf
[46] SBCTC (2023), About Us. Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/about/
[47] Ibid.
[48] Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board (2023), Digital Literacy and IT Career Equity Decision Package. Accessed at: https://wtb.wa.gov

information technology (IT) career development opportunities to help reduce the digital divide in Washington. The main objectives to close disparities in the IT-related workforce include:

- **Reducing Digital Illiteracy**: Implementing digital literacy programs targeted at marginalized populations to ensure they have the foundational skills needed for daily living and IT careers.[49]
- **Building Accessible On-Ramps**: Enhancing existing education and training infrastructure to create equitable and navigable pathways to in-demand, high-wage IT-based careers.

This Digital Equity Plan and the strategies developed by the WSBO emphasize the improvement and expansion of digital literacy skills training and workforce development for marginalized communities and under-resourced populations. These strategies directly align with TAP's strategic priorities for 2024–2028. The activities outlined in this Digital Equity Plan are also aligned with workforce strategies described in the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and Initial Proposal Volume II, which include strategies related to meeting deployment needs and digitally upskilling the Washington workforce.

The objectives outlined in the Digital Equity and BEAD Plans also align with those set by the Governor's Poverty Reduction Work Group's "Blueprint for a Just & Equitable Future: the 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty in Washington".[50] Specifically, digital equity and broadband objectives are aligned with the plan's Recommendation 2e: Make high-speed broadband internet universally available. The digital divide has long been a concern for people with low incomes and became especially acute during COVID-19. Digital equity is necessary for full engagement in education and employment and is increasingly important to support civic participation.

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."[51] 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;

[49] Note: Different state and federal agencies and policy documents use a variety of terminology to refer to communities who have faced historical barriers to access to services, are underserved or underrepresented. In this document, the WSBO has tried to preserve the language related to each associated agency or policy, which includes "covered populations", "underserved populations", "under-resourced" and "marginalized" communities.

[50] Poverty Reduction Work Group (2020), Blueprint for a Just & Equitable Future. Accessed at: Final10yearPlan.pdf (dismantlepovertyinwa.com)

[51] Washington State Legislature (2011), Washington Basic Education Act. Accessed at: RCW 28A.150.210.: Basic education—Goals of school districts. (wa.gov)

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;
4. Understand the importance of work and finance and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities.[52]

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

To help meet these goals, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), created the Educational Technology K-12 Learning Standards. OSPI supports and empowers students, educators, families, and communities through equitable access to high-quality K-12 curriculum, instruction, and supports. 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.[53]

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 OSPI. The standards have specific recommendations for how students can learn by leveraging technology from kindergarten through senior year of high school. Students are expected to access digital devices and develop digital literacy skills to accomplish the standards outlined by OSPI, which can only be possible through the expansion of broadband services. 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. Additionally, 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.[54] The U.S. Department of Education and the Washington State Legislature provide funding to OSPI to assist with supporting the education of students experiencing homelessness and students in foster care by encouraging innovative

[52] Ibid.
[53] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2018), Educational Technology Learning Standards. Accessed at: https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/edtech/standards/pubdocs/k-12-edtech-standards-complete-2018.pdf
[54] 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

practices that reduce educational disruptions, strengthen school stability, and improve academic performance of which access to online educational resources and technology is crucial.[55]

The Washington State Board of Education is committed to academic attainment for every student, which requires access and opportunity gaps to be eliminated. It 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.[56] These efforts are intended to narrow academic achievement gaps and eradicate disparities in student outcomes by factors such as "race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, caste, and socioeconomics".[57]

Washington state's education departments and agencies focus on reducing barriers for underserved populations and under-resourced communities of which digital inequity is a significant one. Strategies in this Digital Equity Plan aim to enhance the efforts to reduce barriers to education and advance access to technology, including digital devices, internet connection, and digital skills training.

[55] 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
[56] Ibid.
[57] Washington State Board of Education (2023), Equity. Accessed at: https://www.sbe.wa.gov/about-us/equity

HEALTH OUTCOMES

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) works with other healthcare providers to protect and improve the health of all state residents. Its 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.[58]

DOH additionally strives to implement the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Healthcare throughout their services.[59] One of DOH's objectives is to increase awareness, education, and outreach to address racial and ethnic minority health and health disparity problems. A second objective is 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. These objectives also include providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services, service provider education and training, and increased workforce diversity.

Digital equity requires culturally sensitive, linguistically, and functionally accessible online resources and services that can be used by all individuals, including those with disabilities. Strategies outlined in this Digital Equity Plan will work towards creating guidance related to online accessibility and inclusivity, which can be applied towards health and wellness resources. These resources will be available 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 will also expand residents' opportunity to access telehealth services—a service vital for many Washingtonians. Telehealth can be a critical service to individuals who do not have access to dependable or affordable transportation, those with chronic and debilitating physical or mental health conditions, aging individuals, and our rural communities that typically need to travel long distances for preventative and emergency healthcare. By improving access to reliable internet, this Digital Equity Plan will enhance the objectives of DOH: equity and optimal health for all.

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

[59] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (n.d.), Cultural and Linguistic Competency. Accessed at: Cultural and Linguistic Competency | Office of Minority Health (hhs.gov).

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 critical local needs of residents of Washington.[60] 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.[61] 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 enabling all individuals to have access to resources to participate in online civic activities.

Washington state also 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 Washington State Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA), and the Washington State 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." CHA spearheaded a "Get Out & Vote" campaign in 2022 to empower Hispanic citizens to participate in the democratic system by voting in local, state, and national elections. CHA used a variety of campaign outreach tools, including social media and other online platforms. CAAA reaches out to the Black community and government agencies to improve services to their community, share information about programs, grants, and services, and advance their legislative agenda that focuses on the needs of the Black community.[62] CAPAA has a Washington State Bill Tracker on their website for focus areas that affect the Asian Pacific American community,

[60] Serve Washington (2023), About Us. Accessed at: https://servewashington.wa.gov/about-us
[61] Serve Washington (2020), State Service Plan for 2020-2022. Accessed at: https://servewashington.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/stateserviceplan_2020-2022_final.pdf
[62] Washington State Commission on African American Affairs (2022), Our Activities. Accessed at: https://caaa.wa.gov/what-we-do/our-activities

including bills about health and human services, education, economic development, civil rights, and immigration.[63]

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 impedes 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. This is vital for commissions such as CHA, CAAA, and CAPAA as they attempt to reach their respective communities to empower them to engage democratically with Washington.

[63] Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (2023), CAPAA Tracker. Accessed at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q9NgEnowXlQxir4IeMb3oJNV2i7RBUOoHC_0SXKoukg/edit#gid=0

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.[64] Most importantly, they are focused on the well-being of children and youth. Its 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."[65] 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, and other services for families, youth, and other service providers.[66]

DCYF serves at-risk children and youth, with the goal of producing better outcomes in all Washington communities. Its 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.[67] 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.[68] 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.[69] Enhancing availability of services and supports is a goal that DCYF has emphasized for each priority area. Many applications to enroll in state-funded assistance programs have transitioned to online forms, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This requires families and youth to use the internet and a digital device to access 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,

[64] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/
[65] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Mission, Vision, and Values. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/about/mission-vision-values
[66] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Our Services. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services
[67] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Strategic Plan. Accessed at: https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/strategic-plan
[68] 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
[69] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (2023), Strategic Priorities for 2021-2026.

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.[70] 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 DSHS.[71] DSHS's 2023–2025 Strategic Plan outlines future goals for each of its administrations.[72] **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:

[70] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/
[71] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. Accessed at: https://www.dshs.wa.gov/
[72] 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 Categories from the DSHS Strategic Plan that Align with Digital Equity

Essential Service Categories	Strategic Objective	Digital Equity Alignment
Aging and Long-Term Support Administration[73]	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 needed to benefit from technology.
Behavioral Health Administration[74]	Provide culturally appropriate services and programming for American Indian and Alaska Native patients within Behavioral Health Administration facilities.	Digital equity includes ensuring culturally appropriate services and online programming for all races and ethnicities, including for American Indian and Alaska Native individuals in Washington.
Developmental Disabilities Administration[75]	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[76]	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[77]	Continue to improve on the mobile work environment by optimizing telework options, supporting flexible work schedules, and minimizing office footprints.	Digital equity and 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 information at home and in the workplace.
Facilities, Finances, and Analytics Administration[78]	Increase efforts to build an equitable, diverse, accessible, and inclusive work environment.	Digital equity 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.

[73] 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
[74] 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
[75] 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
[76] 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
[77] 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
[78] 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

2.3 *Strategies and Objectives*

To reduce the digital divide in Washington, the state has identified key strategies aligned to each goal. Each strategy bears in mind the broader state goals previously mentioned.

For eliminating barriers:

Strategy 1 - Broadband availability & affordability: Expand broadband availability and increase affordability.

Universal Objective 1: All Washingtonians have the opportunity to access and afford broadband service.

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

Universal Objective 2: All Washingtonians can access and afford the devices needed to maintain digital connectivity.

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

Universal Objective 3: Support inclusive practices that allow access to digital services for everyone.

For empowering residents:

Strategy 4 - Digital literacy: Provide services that increase digital literacy.

Universal Objective 4: All Washingtonians have opportunities to acquire the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity activities.

Strategy 5 - Online privacy & cybersecurity: Promote practices and leverage tools to enable online privacy and security.

Universal Objective 5: Advance measures that keep Washingtonians safe and protected online from cyber threats.

For advancing sustainability:

Strategy 6 - Sustainability: Embed digital equity considerations into larger statewide efforts to advance the sustainability of this work.

Universal Objective 6: Build partnerships with tribal governments, state agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, and other digital equity focused organizations to sustain digital equity work.

These strategies and objectives also have activities, potential partners, and considerations. These have been outlined previously in **Table 1**and are further detailed in **Chapter 5**.

2.4 Measuring Digital Equity Success in Washington

2.4.1 Aligning Success with Existing Statewide Efforts

While success starts with access to high-speed broadband for every Washington resident, success also includes facilitating access that is equitable, affordable, culturally inclusive, and of use to all 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.

Supporting equitable broadband services is critical to economic growth, job creation, workforce development, educational outcomes, health outcomes, civic and social engagement, and delivery of other 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, community and technical colleges, and community-based organizations 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 OSPI and the Washington State Board of Education, SBCTC, community and technical colleges, and community-based organizations 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: Supporting DOH and the Washington State Health Care 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, the WSBO will work with partner agencies to increase the availability and awareness of culturally sensitive and linguistically accessible online healthcare resources and services.

Civic and social engagement: Working with state commissions, Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, the Commission on African American Affairs, the Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, 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 navigation services, to enhance essential services. Collaborating partners may include DSHS, the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC), and other agencies identified through additional engagement.

2.4.2 Approach to Measuring Success for the Digital Equity Plan

The Digital Equity Plan sets universal objectives for all Washingtonians that can be achieved through sub-objectives geared towards covered populations disproportionately affected by the digital divide. The WSBO/DEU aim to address group-based discrimination or compounding

intersectional barriers by creating these covered population-focused sub-objectives. Overall, the Digital Equity Plan is intended to make the vision for digital equity a reality for all Washingtonians. However, digital equity efforts will also need to focus on addressing the unique needs of covered populations in the state to achieve the universal objectives and the statewide goals.

Statewide goals are supported by strategies that include measurable objectives and activities to address the needs of all Washingtonians, with an approach towards addressing the needs of the state's covered populations. Progress towards objectives and sub-objectives will be documented in annual progress reports that will be shared with the public. Additionally, data related to the Digital Navigator Program will be updated quarterly and tracked on the Digital Equity Dashboard that is currently under development. Sub-objectives are designed to be measurable to support the effectiveness of the Digital Equity Plan's strategies and core activities. Sub-objectives for specific covered populations were selected based on a review of qualitative and quantitative data indicating where some of the biggest gaps exist in access to broadband service, devices, and digital skills. This includes baseline data, key performance indicators (KPIs), as well as near- and long-term targets.

Considerations for digital equity are not always embedded into data collection efforts across Washington, resulting in significant data gaps for things like the type of skills individuals were taught through digital skill trainings, or the number of foster care families with digital device ownership. These data gaps are acknowledged in the following tables. The WSBO is working to either begin tracking those data points internally, working to pinpoint where in Washington those data points may already exist, or working towards establishing partnerships with other state entities who are working directly with covered populations to begin collecting data relating to digital inclusion. The WSBO will continue to work with other state agencies and CBOs doing digital equity related work to help build more robust datasets related to digital equity.

Tables 3–8 illustrate the relationship between goals, strategies, universal objectives, and sub-objectives. Footnotes and italicized text provide background information on the steps the WSBO is taking to fill data gaps.

Table 3: Strategy 1 with Universal Objective and Sub-objectives

Goal 1: Eliminate Barriers				
Strategy 1	Expand broadband availability and increase affordability.			
Universal objective 1	All Washingtonians to have the opportunity to access and afford broadband service.			
Sub-objectives				
1.1 Aging Individuals	**1.2 Individuals with Disabilities**	**1.3 Low-income Households**	**1.4 Racial/Ethnic Minorities**	**1.5 Rural Inhabitants**
Increase the percentage of aging individuals (60+ years) living on a fixed income who have broadband service.	Increase the percentage of individuals with a disability able to access reliable and affordable internet to power their assistive technology	Increase access to low-cost internet plans that are reliable and sustainably available to low-income households	Increase broadband service access for American Indian and Alaskan Native individuals	Reduce the percentage of unserved/ underserved locations in rural areas
Baseline Data[79]				
74% of individuals 60+ years have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide	71% of individuals with a disability have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide	29% of eligible households enrolled in ACP (*Note: may need to update if ACP is discontinued*)	70% have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide—the lowest of any racial/ethnic minority	92% of all unserved/ underserved locations in Washington are in rural areas[80]
Key Performance Indicators				
Percentage of aging individuals with access to broadband	Percentage of individuals with a disability with access to broadband	Percentage of eligible households enrolled in ACP or successor program	Percentage of American Indian and Alaskan Native individuals with access to broadband	Percentage of unserved/ underserved locations in rural areas
Near- and Long-term Targets				
Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Increase by 10% Long-term: Increase by 20%	Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Reduce by 50% Long-term: Reduce by 90%

[79] Sources: 1) ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded. 2) Institute for Local Self-Reliance Affordable Connectivity Program Dashboard (2023). Accessed at: https://acpdashboard.com/

[80] Underserved location analysis from FCC broadband serviceable location fabric for Washington state as of October 24, 2023.The rural boundaries were sourced from: Office of Financial Management, Census Geographic Files. Accessed at: Census geographic files | Office of Financial Management (wa.gov)

Table 4: Strategy 2 with Universal Objective and Sub-objectives

Goal 1: Eliminate Barriers	
Strategy 2	Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability.
Universal objective 2	Washingtonians can access and afford the devices needed to maintain digital connectivity.
Sub-objectives	
2.1 Low-income Households	**2.2 Racial/Ethnic Minorities**
Increase the percentage of low-income households that own a laptop or computer	Increase the percentage of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals that own a laptop or computer
Baseline Data[81]	
78% of individuals receiving Medicaid or other governmental assistance own a laptop or desktop compared to 87% statewide *(Proxy data as Medicaid is a means-tested program limited to low-income households)*[82]	73% of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals own a laptop or computer, compared to 87% statewide—the lowest of any racial/ethnic minority
Key Performance Indicators	
Percentage of households receiving Medicaid or other governmental assistance that own a laptop or computer	Percentage of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals with a laptop or computer
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%

[81] U.S. Census (2023). ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/search?ds=ACSPUMS1Y2022&cv=HISPEED&rv=ucgid,RAC1P&wt=PWGTP&g=0400000US53

[82] The WSBO recognizes that there are different ways to measure poverty. The 150% federal poverty level established as a criteria in the Digital Equity Planning Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is lower than both the ACP's eligibility criteria of 200% federal poverty level and the recommended Washington State Self-Sufficiency Standard. Further discussion and research are needed to reconcile these gaps to support low-income households.

Table 5: Strategy 3 with Universal Objective and Sub-objectives

Goal 1: Eliminate Barriers	
Strategy 3	Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity
Universal Objective 3	Support inclusive practices that allow access to digital services regardless for everyone
Sub-objectives	
3.1 Individuals with a Language Barrier	**3.2 Individuals with a Language Barrier and/or Disability**
Increased multilingual resources available related to digital inclusion activities	Encourage the improvement of technical support offerings from internet service providers to include multilingual services and accessibility tools to assist both individuals with disabilities and individuals with limited English proficiency in a culturally/ linguistically appropriate way
Baseline Data	
• 9 of 39 counties mentioned language access as a barrier to digital equity in their CAPs[83] • Over 120 languages spoken in Washington[84] • 20.5% of persons over age five speak a language other than English at home	*Baseline will be determined through surveying BEAD applicants on if they offer any multilingual services or accessibility tools to customers*
Key Performance Indicators	
Number of languages that multilingual resources are available in for digital equity related curriculum available through partners like Digital Navigator grantees and other state agencies	Number of multilingual and accessible technical support offerings offered by internet service providers participating in the BEAD program
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term: Digital literacy curriculum materials shared on Internet for All website available in top five most widely spoken languages in Washington Long-term: Digital literacy curriculum materials shared on Internet for All website in top 15 most widely spoken languages in Washington	Near-term: Establish baseline Long-term: Work with ISPs to set annual improvement target

[83] Review of Community Action Plans. Accessed at: https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/v/CommunityActionPlans/folder/218672886930

[84] U.S. Census (2023). ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/search?ds=ACSPUMS1Y2022&cv=HISPEED&rv=HHLANP&nv=ucgid&wt=PWGTP&g=0400000US53

Table 6: Strategy 4 with Universal Objective and Sub-objectives

Goal 2: Empower Residents	
Strategy 4	Provide services that promote digital literacy.
Universal objective 4	Washingtonians have opportunities to acquire the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity activities.
Sub-objectives	
4.1 All covered populations (except incarcerated individuals – see Sub-objective 4.2**)**	**4.2 Incarcerated individuals**
Increase opportunities for covered populations to receive digital navigation services	Include digital navigation services as part of wraparound services to support reentry
Baseline Data	
In 2023: 155,651 individuals assisted by Digital Navigator Program (breakdown by covered populations not available from all grantees)[85] *Future cohorts of the Digital Navigator Program will have more information on numbers by specific covered populations. The DEU will work with other partners who are offering digital skill to gather data on other trainings being offered.*	In 2023: 149 interactions with incarcerated individuals[86]
Key Performance Indicators	
Number of interactions with digital navigators (all covered populations except incarcerated individuals)	Number of interactions with digital navigators for incarcerated individuals
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term target: Increase by 10% relative to covered population baseline Long-term target: Increase by 20% relative to covered population baseline	Near-term target: Increase by 20% relative to baseline Long-term target: Increase by 40%relative to baseline

[85] Digital Equity Unit (2024). Digital Navigator Program Data. Shared over email.
[86] Connect Washington (2024). Digital Navigation Monthly Reporting Dashboard. Results filtered for 2023 "Correctional" population. Accessed at: https://connect-wa.org/digital-navigation-monthly-reporting/

Table 7: Strategy 5 with Universal Objective

Goal 2: Empower Residents	
Strategy 5	Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security.
Universal objective 5	Advancing measures that keep Washingtonians safe and protected online from cyber threats.
Baseline Data[87]	
35 per 100,000 population fraud reports related to internet services reported in the Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel Network for the 2022.	
Key Performance Indicators	
Number of fraud reports related to internet services per 100,000 population (all covered populations)	
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term: Reduce by 10% Long-term: Reduce by 25%	

[87] Federal Trade Commission (2023). FTC Consumer Sentinel Network. Accessed at: Tableau FTC Consumer Sentinel Network. Note: The Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel Network uses 2021 Census state population estimate, but the number was calculated using the 2022 Census estimates so there is a slight decrease in the ratio. Internet service-related reports include problems with website content; difficulty canceling an ISP or online account; issues with online payment services, social networking services, internet gaming, and virtual reality; undisclosed charges; website design and promotion services; and problems with broadband internet services and content, including the truthfulness of cost, access, and speed disclosures.

Table 8: Strategy 6 with Universal Objective

Goal 3: Advance Sustainability	
Strategy 6	Embed digital equity considerations into larger statewide efforts to advance the sustainability of this work.
Universal objective 6	Advance statewide partnerships with tribal governments, state agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, and other digital equity focused organizations to sustain digital equity work.
Baseline Data	
• There are currently 79 assets listed on the Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory.[88] • In 2023, there were 1,476 unique visitors to the Internet for All in Washington website.	
Key Performance Indicators	
• Awareness of Internet for All in Washington website resources and the Digital Equity Dashboard once the dashboard is published. • Work with partners to update Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory annually. • Capacity of partners to apply for funding	
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term: • Increase website visits by 10% • At least one partner organization applies for the NTIA's Competitive Digital Equity Program Long-term: • Increase website visits by 20% • Digital navigation is embedded into at least one additional state agency's services	

As the WSBO continues with the statewide outreach plan to gather the available data necessary to accurately understand the state of digital equity across Washington specific to each covered population, the WSBO will be establishing reporting mechanisms to track progress including an annual progress report. Some metrics will be tracked on the initial version of the Digital Equity Dashboard related to broadband availability, ACP enrollment, and Digital Navigator Program activities, but the Dashboard will need to be developed iteratively as baseline data becomes available.

[88] Note: Individual programs run by the state's 348 public library branch locations are not listed individually and are grouped under the category of "Libraries" as a single asset. In future years if more details on individual library programs are available this may be broken out into further detail.

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's Digital Equity Act in 2022 and the formation of a statewide Digital Equity Forum in 2021. Collectively, the Washington State Broadband Office's (WSBO's) work history shows a commitment to supporting Washington residents in receiving increased access to internet connectivity and information technology.[89] Another example of the state's commitment to equitable access to technology is the K-20 Education Network, established by state law in 1996. It 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.[90] The City of Seattle has also been a pioneer in digital equity, starting Technology Access and Adoption research in 2000 and being officially recognized as a "Digital Inclusion Trailblazer" from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance in 2022.[91, 92] 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 lead 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 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. Washington uses many assets and partnerships, all of which contribute to broadband expansion and coverage, to help with 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 benefit from, the internet.[93]

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. The Digital Equity Plan uses four primary methods to identify assets related to digital equity throughout the state, which are:

[89] 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/
[90] 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
[91] City of Seattle, Seattle Information Technology: Digital Equity. Accessed at: https://www.seattle.gov/tech/initiatives/digital-equity.
[92] 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/
[93] 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

1. A 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 identify mentions of digital inclusion assets used by the public.
3. Informational interviews with state agencies, departments, social services, and other digital equity champions in Washington to discuss digital equity programs.
4. Community Action Plans submitted to the WSBO from county and tribal government Broadband Action Teams (BATs).
5. Digital inclusion assets shared through public comments.

STATEWIDE DIGITAL INCLUSION EFFORTS

In May 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 healthcare, education, and essential services, providing economic opportunities, and enhancing public health and safety.*[94]

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.[95] The WSBO will work closely with community partners, their BATs, and state partners to support digital equity work across the state.[96]

The state's efforts towards reducing availability, affordability and adoption barriers have been bolstered through the creation of several programs administered by the WSBO. For 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.[97]

[94] Washington State Legislature (2021), RCW 43.330.532. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532
[95] Washington State Legislature (2021), RCW 43.330.532. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.330.532
[96] 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/
[97] 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 9** provide culturally relevant efforts to specifically meet the needs of populations served. The following tables are non-exhaustive as there are often informal digital inclusion assets that communities self-organize. However, they help to identify examples 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 the population described below in **Table 9**.[98]

Table 9: Covered Populations from the Digital Equity NOFO and ESSHB 1723[99]

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) Limited English Proficient individuals: Individuals who speak a language other than English at home and speak English less than "very well" and 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	• Individuals under the age of 25 (in Washington) who have been removed from their home due to abuse or neglect by a parent or guardian.
Individuals experiencing housing instability	• Individuals and families who 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 | ESSHB 1723

[98] 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

[99] 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. For example, the state produced a map of Drive-in Hotspots, which provides Washingtonians with the location of free public Wi-Fi, computer labs, device lending programs, digital navigation support, and/or hotspots for temporary internet service.[100] There has also been an increase in informal agency and organization programs in response to the needs of communities, 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. Their physical locations are open and available to assist their communities by providing public networks, devices, and staff that can provide in-person support.[101] **Figure 2** illustrates some examples of organizations offering general digital equity assets across the state. Some assets are critical resources for the population they locally serve, as further emphasized by the Community Action Plans (CAPs). A link to all CAPs is in **Appendix 7.3**.

Digital inclusion spotlight

As a result of COVID-19, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) 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 places above where people can seek assistance and access digital devices and resources, several other statewide digital inclusion assets are available to multiple populations. **Table 10** provides a non-exhaustive list of digital assets currently available across Washington for multiple covered populations.

[100] 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/

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

Table 10: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets Serving Multiple Covered Population[102]

Asset	Description	Covered Population
Association of Washington 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 subsidies for free Wi-Fi, digital navigation services, and computer labs for residents to use.	Low-income households; aging individuals; individuals with a disability; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Computing for All	The Computing for All program 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; individuals with a disability; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Digital Navigator Program	The Digital Navigator Program is a part of the Digital Equity Unit, which collaborates closely with the WSBO and community partners. Digital Navigators can help residents navigate the internet, sign up for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) – a federal low-income internet assistance program – connect with government and community services, acquire digital literacy skills, and more.	All
Equity in Education Coalition	The Equity in Education Coalition works 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 assistance with ACP enrollment.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants

[102] Note: Inclusion in this table is not a verification that all of these assets are currently operational. While resources have been reviewed to the extent possible, there are times when publicly available information does not accurately reflect the current operational status.

Asset	Description	Covered Population
Libraries	Public libraries serve as important community anchor institutions; in 2022 over 17 million annual visits were recorded in Washington state libraries. Communities often visit libraries for digital navigation services, laptops and hotspots on loan, access points for critical services like telehealth, and access to computer labs, printers, Wi-Fi and numerous other educational and informational services.[103]	All
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 limited 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
Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center	The Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center serves a seven-state region (AK, WA, OR, MT, ID, WY, UT) to advance the development, implementation and integration of telehealth through sharing information, leveraging resources, and creating a synergistic telehealth community.	All
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 applicable to the workplace and general digital literacy. Individuals can learn to use Microsoft 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
TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk (Equity in Education Coalition)	The TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk provides free multi-lingual, multi-cultural technical support to Washington residents to help them engage in a virtual environment. Helpdesk technicians provide technical guidance, digital navigation support, and connections to other community resources, such as telehealth calls, and online access to food, rental assistance, and socio-emotional supports. The program supports all community members including parents, students, and aging individuals.	Low-income households; aging individuals; Individuals with a disability; veterans; people with language barriers; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants

[103] Washington State Library (2022), 2022 Annual Library Service Measures. Accessed at: https://apps.sos.wa.gov/_assets/library/libraries/libDev/2022stats.pdf

Asset	Description	Covered Population
Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)	SBCTC 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.	All
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; individuals with a disability; veterans; people with language barriers; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants

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

REGIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ASSETS THAT SERVE MULTIPLE COVERED POPULATIONS

Washington has an immense network of organizations, such as nonprofits, associations, coalitions, councils, foundations, and community action groups, which work to support, empower, and build resilience and self-sufficiency for covered populations living within the area they serve. **Table 11** is a list of several digital inclusion assets specifically pertaining to a region, city, or locality. This list is non-exhaustive, but it illustrates the diversity of digital inclusion assets across the state.

Table 11: Regional Digital Inclusion Assets[104]

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 or incentives for attendance. Classes offered to those who are in AmeriCorps, or who need digital literacy assistance, budgeting help, or help with English. The non-profit also provides device/mobile hotspot lending.	Low-income households; Individuals with a disability; people with language barriers; rural inhabitants
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; individuals with a disability; aging individuals; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
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 resources and assistance, including digital literacy classes and job training courses. They also help with resource navigation to find options for low-income cell phones and low-income internet service providers.	Low-income households; individuals with a disability; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Community for the Advancement of Family Education	Community for the Advancement of Family Education 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 ACP.	Racial and ethnic minorities; people with language barriers; low-income households
Digital Equity Learning Network of King County	Digital Equity Learning Network of King County is a broad coalition of nonprofits, community anchor institutions, and local government (open to all). They meet to share resources and create workshops on best practices, funding and policy that impacts digital equity work and provides networking opportunities.	All

[104] Note: Inclusion in this table is not a verification that all these assets are currently operational. While resources have been reviewed to the extent possible, there are times when publicly available information does not accurately reflect the current operational status.

Asset	Description	Covered Population
Metropolitan Development Council	The Metropolitan Development Council is a community action agency working against poverty by offering programs for behavioral health, housing, youth education, adult education, food assistance, energy assistance, and weatherization. They also offer education and employment workshops, digital navigation for online applications, low-cost devices, mobile computer units, computer classes, and online learning accounts through a NorthStar partnership.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
NCW Tech Alliance	NCW Tech Alliance offers a variety of programs for the community, including a Community Skills Initiative to provide free digital skills trainings and Computers for Community to provide computers to children in need. NCW Tech Alliance also offers Project iLumina, 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 for community members to effectively engage online.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; individuals with a disability; 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. These include computer basics, digital navigation assistance, and social service assistance.	Low-income households; racial and ethnic minorities; veterans
Pateros Brewster Community Resource Center	Pateros Brewster Community Resource Center is a non-profit corporation that provides a location and infrastructure for critical community needs. It helps connect families to free public Wi-Fi, mobile hotspots, and affordable digital devices. It also has a technology center with 16 laptops, four computers, scanners, printers, projectors, and other technology equipment for community use.	Low-income households; aging individuals; veterans; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants
Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation	Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation protects and promotes the rights of immigrants, Latinx, and underrepresented communities through advocacy, support through services, and resources. It serves nine counties in Washington and provides digital navigation services and phone distribution.	Racial and ethnic minorities; people with language barriers; low-income households
Washington State University (WSU)-Extension 4-H Tech Changemakers Program	4-H Tech Changemakers help 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.	Low-income households; aging individuals; individuals with a disability; veterans; people with language barriers; racial and ethnic minorities; rural inhabitants

A full catalog 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.[105] About 16% of the population in Washington is aged 65 and over according to the United States Census of 2020.[106] The Washington State Office of Financial Management estimates that approximately 27% of residents will be 65 or older by 2040.[107]

Digital connectivity for aging individuals can be crucial for health and wellness, as emphasized by several participants during the Internet for All in Washington focus groups. During a focus group tailored to aging individuals, participants mentioned, "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." Additionally, many security alarm systems rely on internet connectivity for full functionality, and access to telehealth services can provide older adults with more options to manage healthcare needs. This demonstrates two important examples of critical services that rely on the internet and the ability to use digital technology.

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.[108] Yet, the same report states that once older adults joined the online world, digital technology often became an integral part of their daily lives. They used the internet to access information and essential services, 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 older adults backed this finding with 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."

105 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

106 United States Census Bureau (2022), QuickFacts: Washington. Accessed at: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WA

107 Office of Financial Management (n.d.), Population Estimates. Accessed at: https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics/population-estimates

108 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 12** below.

Table 12: 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 aging individuals with tech training using an intergenerational, volunteer model. Young people are provided with lessons and learning activities to train them to function 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 aging individuals who want to help increase each other's knowledge, skills and enjoyment of computers and technology. They offer digital literacy classes and training for aging individuals, 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 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 assist homebound aging individuals including through pilots such as ElliQ which serve homebound aging individuals and promote 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 catalog of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.2 Incarcerated Individuals

Washington state has a little under 14,000 individuals currently incarcerated within a state facility.[109] 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.[110] However, in December 2019, 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.[111] Washington is seeing a movement towards providing limited connectivity to incarcerated individuals for educational and rehabilitative purposes.[112] Officials from the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) aim to expand secure internet education to all incarcerated students in the state through the Off State Network (OSN), which will allow access to other entities outside of DOC, but the effort is ongoing.

In Washington state, DOC has implemented the OSN, which allows incarcerated individuals to access educational resources and job training material through computer terminals in prison libraries.[113] The system is primarily designed to assist with reentry preparation, as studies show that access to education and skills training reduces recidivism rates.[114] However, significant barriers to digital inclusion still exist for Washington state's justice-involved individuals. These barriers include limited access to technology, restricted internet connectivity and strict controls on online activity such as how much time they can spend on computer terminals and restricted content.[115] 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.[116] Current digital assets serving incarcerated individuals in Washington state are described in **Table 13** below.

[109] Department of Corrections (2024), Inmate Search. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/information/inmate-search/default.aspx

[110] 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

[111] 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/

[112] 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/

[113] Department of Corrections (2024), Interview.

[114] 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

[115] 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

[116] 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 13: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Incarcerated Individuals

Asset	Description
Off State Network	The OSN is designed to allow access to other entities outside of the DOC to use cloud access to share real-time information that can be used for education and workforce development purposes. The network is available through computers with wired connections in classrooms and in law libraries.
Department of Corrections Reentry Navigation Services	DOC 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.
Individual Technology Services	DOC partnered with Securus Technologies to provide Individual Technology Services (phone calls, video visitation, e-messaging, media), which are accessed through a tablet. Incarcerated individuals receive a limited number of free weekly phone calls, monthly video connect sessions, and free stamps for e-messaging.
Prison Scholar Fund	The Prison Scholar Fund is an organization dedicated to helping incarcerated individuals access 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 Washingtonians while supplies lasted.

Additional digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2.**

3.1.1.3 Low-Income Households

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services annually publishes statistics on low-income households as defined by the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Based on these guidelines, the federal definition of "low-income" takes into consideration 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.[117]

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) uses the Federal Poverty Guidelines as a basis for determining eligibility for state programs.[118] However, the state also considers the local cost of living when determining income eligibility for certain state assistance programs.[119] In Washington, low-income individuals represent a significant portion of the population. Their socioeconomic status can unfairly pose a challenge for economic development and their general well-being.[120] When a substantial portion of the population struggles with poverty, it can hinder economic growth and stability.[121] Low-income individuals often face barriers to education, employment opportunities, access to healthcare, mental health resources, and civic engagement. These barriers can result in reduced productivity and limited economic mobility.[122]

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 in Washington, with a child poverty rate of about 13%.[123] Additionally, the Hispanic and Latinx populations 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.[124]

Access to high-speed, reliable internet may assist low-income individuals and households connect 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 described in **Table 14** below.

[117] 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
[118] State of Washington (n.d.), Washington Connection (Your Link to Services). Accessed at: https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/
[119] 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
[120] 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
[121] 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
[122] 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
[123] United States Census Bureau (n.d.), Washington. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/profile/Washington?g=040XX00US53
[124] Ibid.

Table 14: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Low-Income Households

Asset	Description
Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)	The ACP is a Federal Communications Commission (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	Answers Integrated Digital Empowerment assists individuals who have a household income below 200% of the federal poverty level with applying for the ACP, 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 device or pay for a discounted internet bill.
Blue Mountain Action Council	Blue Mountain Action Council is a local nonprofit service for 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.
Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program	The Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program serves patients remotely in all 39 counties across Washington. 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.
InterConnection	InterConnection is a nonprofit organization 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.

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

3.1.1.4 Individuals with Language Barriers

People with language barriers refers to individuals who face challenges in communicating effectively due to limited proficiency in the dominant language spoken in a particular country or region.[125] In this case, the term refers to those who are limited in their proficiency of the English language in Washington state and/or have low levels of literacy.[126] 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.

Various factors influence the demographics of people with language barriers in Washington state, including 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.[127] Advocacy for language access has been an active movement within the state, as evidenced by recent legislative efforts. One such effort advocated for increased access for students and families facing language barriers through the provision of interpretation and support services.[128] The Washington State Coalition for Language Access also works to provide guidance and tools to departments, agencies, residents, and businesses for accessible communications so that all services, programs, and activities are meaningfully available to all constituents.[129]

U.S. Census Bureau data indicates 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.[130] 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.[131] Common non-English languages spoken in the state include Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, Korean, Tagalog, among others.[132] Low literacy rates can also pose a language barrier with an estimated 16.1% of Washington residents identified as having low levels of literacy.[133]

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 described in **Table 15** below.

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[125] Limited English Proficiency. Accessed at: https://www.lep.gov/
[126] Washington State Coalition for Language Access (n.d.), Resources. Accessed at: https://www.wascla.org/resources
[127] 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
[128] 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
[129] Washington State Coalition for Language Access, Services. Accessed at: https://www.wascla.org/services
[130] Migration Policy Institute (2021), State Immigration Data Profiles. Accessed at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/WA/US
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Digital Equity Act Population Viewer. Data pulled from the National Center on Education Statistics and 2019 ACS population file.

Table 15: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for People with Language Barriers

Asset	Description
Asian Counseling and Referral Service's Ready to Work	The Asian Counseling and Referral Service offers a comprehensive Ready to Work program helping people with very limited English overcome language barriers, gain digital literacy skills, find meaningful employment, and achieve economic self-sufficiency.
Organización Centro Americana	Organización Centro Americana 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.
Red de Inclusión Solidaridad y Empoderamiento (RISE)	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 introduction 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.

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

3.1.1.5 Individuals with Disabilities

The federal government defines disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities.[134] According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, an individual with a disability is "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment."[135] The Washington Law Against Discrimination also considers individuals with any sensory, mental, or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities as having a disability.[136]

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) partners with the Centers for Disease Control 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).[137] According to the 2021 BRFSS, roughly 1.5 million adults in Washington have a disability.[138] This is equal to 25%, or 1 in 4 adults, in Washington.[139] The range of the percentage of adults in Washington with select functional disability types varies, 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.[140] 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.[141]

People with disabilities may face 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 unaffordability of internet services and devices. These challenges can 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 are described in **Table 16** below.

[134] US Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (n.d.), As Amended. Accessed at: https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/ada/
[135] Ibid.
[136] Washington State Human Rights Commission (n.d.), 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
[137] Washington State Department of Health (n.d.), Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Accessed at: https://doh.wa.gov/data-statistical-reports/data-systems/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system-brfss. Note: This figure differs from the U.S. Census data due to differences in categories of disabilities and how it is measured.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), Disability Impacts: Washington. Accessed at: https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/washington.html Note: This data does not specify if individuals have overlapping disabilities.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

Table 16: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Individuals with Disabilities

Asset	Description
Centers for Independent Living	Centers for Independent Living are non-residential, private, non-profit, consumer-controlled, community-based organizations. They provide services and advocacy by and for persons with all types of disabilities. Their goal is to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential within their families and communities to achieve and maintain independent living. Several centers provide resources and training related to technology and communication, and in particular assistive technology.
Committee for Accessible Technology Oversight	The Committee for Accessible Technology Oversight advises several SBCTC councils and commissions on matters of accessibility and technology, while supporting the creation of annual work plans and monitoring progress on their achievements. The committee is also responsible for making recommendations, establishing guidelines, and disseminating best practices for technology accessibility.
DeafBlind 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 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.
Department of Services for the Blind	Washington State Department of Services for the Blind provides services for people of all ages who are blind or have low vision in the state of Washington. The agency provides services to more than 2,800 Washington state residents to help them gain or retain employment. Services include assistance obtaining assistive technology devices including phones and tablets, instruction for clients on how to use phones and computers to stay in touch with family and friends, and information on how to make information accessible on documents and websites.
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is a statewide resource under the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services that assists people with disabilities to prepare for, secure, maintain, advance in, or regain employment. The division partners with businesses and organizations to develop employment opportunities. The division serves people who seek meaningful and secure employment, but whose disabilities may result in one or more barriers to achieving employment goals.
Northwest Center	Northwest Center is a leader in advancing equal opportunities for children and adults with developmental disabilities. They provide services in a wide range of areas including early childhood education, after school programs, supported employment, job training, and placement.
Special Technology Access Resource Center	The Special Technology Access Resource Center at the Seattle Housing Authority 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 English-as-a-second language. The lab is free and open to the public.

Asset	Description
Washington State School for the Blind	The school is a school for visually impaired, blind, or deaf-blind students. Services include a support system for access technology needs across the state. There are plans to expand assistance options to include in-person and virtual formats, enhanced assessment offerings, professional development, and the addition of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics support.
Washington Assistive Technology Act Program	The Washington 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 catalog 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, Hispanics or Latinos, Asian Americans, American Indians or Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.[142] 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.[143] People who identify as Hispanic, Latinx, 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 Office of Financial Management, provides detailed demographic information about the state's population.[144]The racial and ethnic composition of Washington state according to the recent population estimates of 2020 is described in **Table 17** below.

Table 17: 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, but they often face challenges related to systemic racism and discrimination.[145] 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, or 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 exacerbate existing inequalities and limit opportunities for racial and ethnic minority groups. In

[142] 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
[143] 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
[144] 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
[145] For more information on systemic racism visit the Office of Equity's webpage on the topic.

Washington state, several programs and resources are available to help address these challenges. Some current digital assets designed to serve racial and ethnic minorities in Washington state are described in **Table 18** below.

Table 18: 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	The Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center 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 programs 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 students who struggled with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent students of color from falling further behind.
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle	The Urban League Metropolitan Seattle works to empower African Americans and other diverse underserved communities to thrive by securing educational and economic opportunities. It 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.

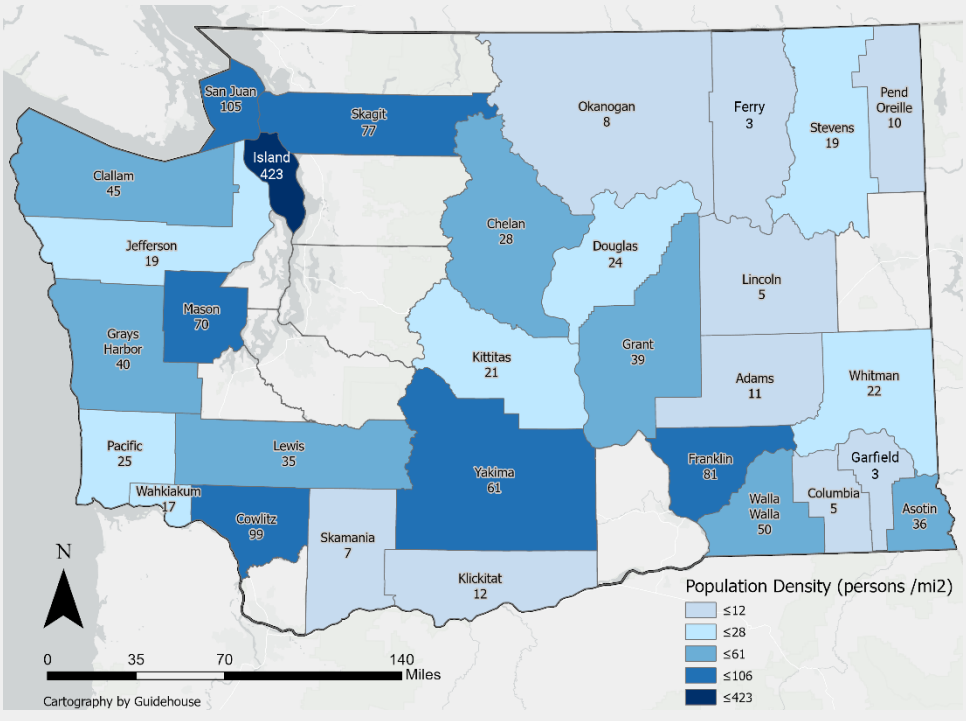
Asset	Description
Villa Comunitaria	Villa Comunitaria provides the program Aula Digital en Accion (Digital Classroom in Action), which is a community driven solution to the challenges underrepresented and immigrant Latinx communities face when using technology to access jobs, apply for citizenship, engage 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 catalog of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

3.1.1.7 Rural Inhabitants

The Digital Equity Notice of Funding Opportunity defines rural areas as any area other than – (1) a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; (2) any urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and (3) in the case of a grant or direct loan, a city, town, or incorporated area that has a population of greater than 20,000 inhabitants.[146] Washington state uses a slightly different definition, by classifying areas as rural based on population density and proximity to urban centers. The Washington State 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."[147] Subsequent legislation expanded the definition to include, "a county smaller than two hundred twenty-five square miles."[148]

According to this definition, as of April 1, 2013, 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.[149]



Map 2: Rural Counties in Washington and the Population Density (persons / mi²)

[146] NTIA (2022). Digital Equity Planning Grant NOFO. Accessed at: https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/DE%20PLANNING%20GRANT%20NOFO.pdf

[147] 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

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid.

According to ACS data, approximately 26.5% of Washington residents live in rural areas.[150] Rural communities in Washington face various challenges. Among these are limited access to health care services, educational institutions, transportation and infrastructure, and job opportunities. Additionally, rural 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 described in **Table 19** below.

Table 19: 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 catalog of digital assets can be found in **Appendix 7.2**.

[150] 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 Notice of Funding Opportunity uses a definition based on number of inhabitants within a defined metropolitan area. Data was pulled from the Digital Equity Act Population Viewer. Accessed at: Digital Equity Act Population Viewer.

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."[151] According to the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), Washington is home to approximately 530,000 veterans, 62,000 active duty, 18,000 guard and reserve, and two million family members.[152] Washington offers free services to veterans through WDVA such as financial assistance, transitional assistance, and counseling.[153] The state also offers special benefits such as state employment preferences, education, and tuition assistance.[154]

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 areas."[155] The report also recognizes the amplified advantage digital connectivity provides for veterans with disabilities.[156]

Veterans without internet access are more likely to be older, unmarried, have completed less education, and earn a lower annual income than veterans reporting current internet access, according to an internet access survey by the National Library of Medicine.[157] 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.[158] 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 described in **Table 20** below.

Table 20: 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.

[151] US Department of Veterans Affairs (2019), Determining Veteran Status. Accessed at: https://www.va.gov/OSDBU/docs/Determining-Veteran-Status.pdf
[152] Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, About WDVA. Accessed at: https://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] 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
[156] Ibid.
[157] National Library of Medicine (2013), Veteran Internet Use and Engagement with Health Information Online. Accessed at: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23707823/
[158] Ibid.

Asset	Description
Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs Digital Navigators Program	In 2023, WDVA's Digital Navigator Program provided 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. (*Note: This program was not funded for FY 2024, but WDVA is seeking additional funding sources*.)

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

ASSETS IDENTIFIED SERVING STATE UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS COVERED UNDER ESSHB1723

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 parents or other legal guardians. In Washington state, state law provides the legal framework for foster care.[159] Accordingly, a child in foster care is defined as an individual under the age of 18 who has been placed under the care and supervision of the DCYF or a licensed child-placing agency.[160]

As reported by a program manager for the DCYF during an informative interview, there were approximately 10,060 children in foster care in Washington state in July 2023. These children live 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 many unique challenges that can impact their well-being and future opportunities. Some of the main challenges observed in Washington include frequent placement changes, educational disruptions, and emotional and behavioral issues. Additionally, when youth age out of foster care, no longer having access to direct support for housing, employment, and accessing supportive services can be challenging. 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 described in **Table 21** below.

[159] 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
[160] Ibid.

Table 21: Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets for Youth in Foster Care

Asset	Description
Independent Living Program, DCYF	The Independent Living 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 for online enrollment into social services.

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

3.1.1.10 Individuals Experiencing Housing Instability

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, a person is considered homeless if they reside in a place not meant for human habitation, emergency shelters, or transitional housing.[161] 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."[162]

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 July 2023 Washington State Snapshot of Homeless in Washington report there were just over 202,000 individuals who were unstably housed or homeless based on combined data sources from Medicaid, Economic Service, and the Homeless Management Information System. The counties with the highest number of homeless households were King County, Pierce County, Snohomish County, and Spokane County, representing over 58% of the total number of homeless households in the state.[163]

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 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 described in **Table 22** below.

[161] 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/

[162] 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

[163] Washington State Department of Commerce (2023), Snapshot of Homelessness Report. Accessed at: Snapshot_July_2023.pdf | Powered by Box

Table 22: 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 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 available 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 catalog 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, all 39 counties and 16 of 29 federally recognized tribes contributed to the development of Community Action Plans (CAPs), which included both digital equity and broadband infrastructure plans, to showcase the unique needs of their communities and offer solutions to achieve digital equity.[164] 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 within the CAPs was the desire for additional funding to expand and extend digital inclusion services. Multiple county and tribal CAPs also mentioned systemic barriers such as lack of housing or transportation as inhibiting digital access.

Additionally, many BATs detailed the desire to learn and share best practices with neighboring counties with the goal of supporting vulnerable communities. **Table 23** provides a snapshot of the submitted Digital Equity CAPs, including barriers identified by the counties and tribes within Washington state.

Table 23: County and Tribe Digital Equity Plan Summaries[165]

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 county 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, language barriers, 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 Reservation & Ferry County	Identified affordability and availability as major barriers to connection within the county

[164] In addition to the 12 tribes that submitted independent Community Action Plans, four tribes partnered with counties in developing a Community Action Plan.

[165] Note: Across the board, insufficient funding was identified as a challenge, but is listed out when it was explicitly identified in plans.

Activity Name	Barrier to Digital Equity
Cowlitz County	Identified a lack of community wide digital equity resources including nonprofit and organization support, limited equipment, and understaffed libraries
Cowlitz Indian Tribe	Identified groups facing the greatest needs as elderly, low-income, individuals with language barriers, and tribal members in rural or remote locations
Douglas County	Identified lack of planning and coordination, resources, language barriers, 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	Identified understaffed community resources such as libraries and that individuals living in rural areas need to travel long distances to access digital equity services
Grant County	Identified lack of planning and coordination, resources, language barriers, 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 residents with digital equity services
Hoh Indian 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	Identified lack of transportation to digital equity services, lack of material in languages other than English, understaffing at community anchor sites, and 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 ISPs
Kittitas County	Identified community awareness, outreach, and perceived value of learning new technology and its economic utility and potential opportunities
Klickitat County	Identified 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 systemic barriers such as transportation to access services at libraries or other community anchor organizations

Activity Name	Barrier to Digital Equity
Makah Tribe	Identified 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
Nisqually Indian Tribe & Thurston County	Identified need for sourcing translation services as well as devices to maximize effectiveness of digital skills training
Nooksack Indian Tribe	Identified that lack of 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 historically underserved tribal community
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 ISPs
Samish Indian Nation	Identified sustainability of supporting the community in obtaining personal devices and maintain locations for communities to access public networks as a major barrier, including maintaining the devices and reliability of the internet service at the public network locations
San Juan County	Identified services that are concentrated on three islands for organizations providing digital equity services 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	Identified 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	Identified lack of resources, lack of unified approach to sharing information with the community, inconsistent services

Activity Name	Barrier to Digital Equity
Wahkiakum County	Identified need for more resources and services within the county including support for community anchor organization, equipment, and facilities to meet community needs
Walla Walla County	Identified 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
The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation	Identified a lack of devices, limited access to property due to jurisdictional barriers, and an inability to pay due to fixed incomes

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,

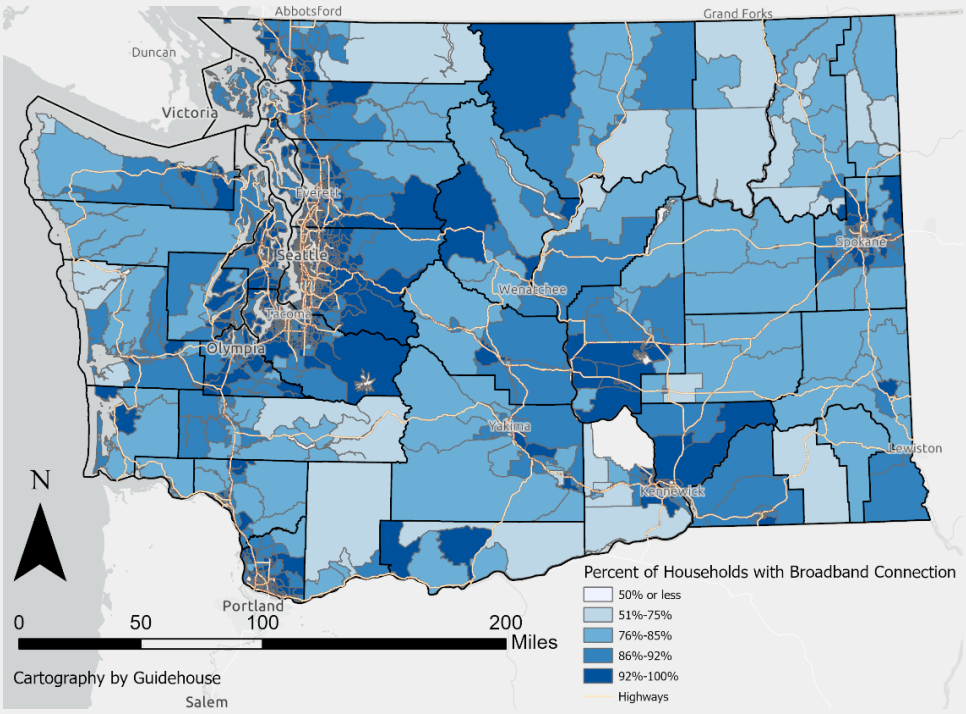
(2) With the digital skills necessary to fully participate online, and

(3) On a personal device and secure convenient network."[166]

Using ACS data, an average of 92% of households within the state have a broadband internet subscription and 96% have digital devices.[167] This is likely an overcount as these rates include Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) technology, but for the BEAD Program, locations served only by DSL technology will be considered underserved.[168] Additionally, 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 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,

[166] Digital Equity Act of 2021 (2021). Accessed at: 47 USC Ch. 16: BROADBAND ACCESS (house.gov)
[167] 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]. Note this estimate includes satellite and cellular service
[168] Washington State Department of Commerce (2023). Initial Proposal Volume I. Accessed at: https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/internet-for-all-wa/

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 Broadband Subscription by Census Tract[169]

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

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. 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 partnership example is the previously WSBO-funded digital navigation services offered by WDVA in collaboration with T-Mobile. This program provided 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 offerings. 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

[169] 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.

adoption. Comcast and Goodwill also announced the expansion of Comcast's Internet Essentials broadband adoption program, which allows low-cost internet to be more available 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.[170]

A third example is the partnership between AT&T and Digitunity who selected InterConnection to provide refurbished computers and technical support to two thousand Seattle-based students through their 10-City Project.[171] 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 supporting broadband adoption by focusing on improving digital literacy and augmenting digital skills. As **Table 24** 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 children and youth in foster care.

[170] 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/

[171] 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 24: Examples of Programs Supporting Broadband Adoption

Organization Names	Asset Description	Asset Type	Covered Populations[172]
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.[173]	Digital Literacy Program	Individuals with a language barrier; Individuals who are members of a racial/ethnic minority group
Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program	A program that serves patients in all 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.[174]	Digital Navigator Program	Individuals who live in low-income households

[172] "Target Covered Populations" describes the 8 population groups NTIA identified as underrepresented communities: low-income households; aging 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.

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

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

Organization Names		Asset Description	Asset Type	Covered Populations[172]
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.[175]	Digital Skills Training Program	All	
HelpingLink	A program that offers iPad lessons and training for adults and older adults, 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.[176]	Digital Literacy Program	Aging individuals; Individuals with a language barrier; Individuals who are members of a racial/ethnic minority group	
InterConnection	A nonprofit organization that enables digital equity by providing technology and connectivity to underserved communities through sustainable refurbishment and re-use of digital devices.[177]	Discounted Device Program	All	

[175] Computing for All (n.d.), Launch Your Tech Career. Accessed at: https://www.computingforall.org/
[176] Helping Link (n.d.). Accessed at: https://www.helpinglink.org/about/
[177] InterConnection (n.d.). Accessed at: https://interconnection.org/

Organization Names		Asset Description	Asset Type	Covered Populations[172]
Microsoft LEARN (formerly Microsoft Imagine Academy)	Microsoft's centralized training and professional development platform for K-12, 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.[178]	Digital Skills Training Program	All	
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.[179]	Digital Navigator Program	All except incarcerated individuals	

[178] Microsoft (n.d.), Microsoft Learn. Accessed at: Training | Microsoft Learn
[179] Seattle Housing Authority (n.d.), Technology Training. Accessed at: https://www.seattlehousing.org/supportive-services/education-and-job-training/technology-training

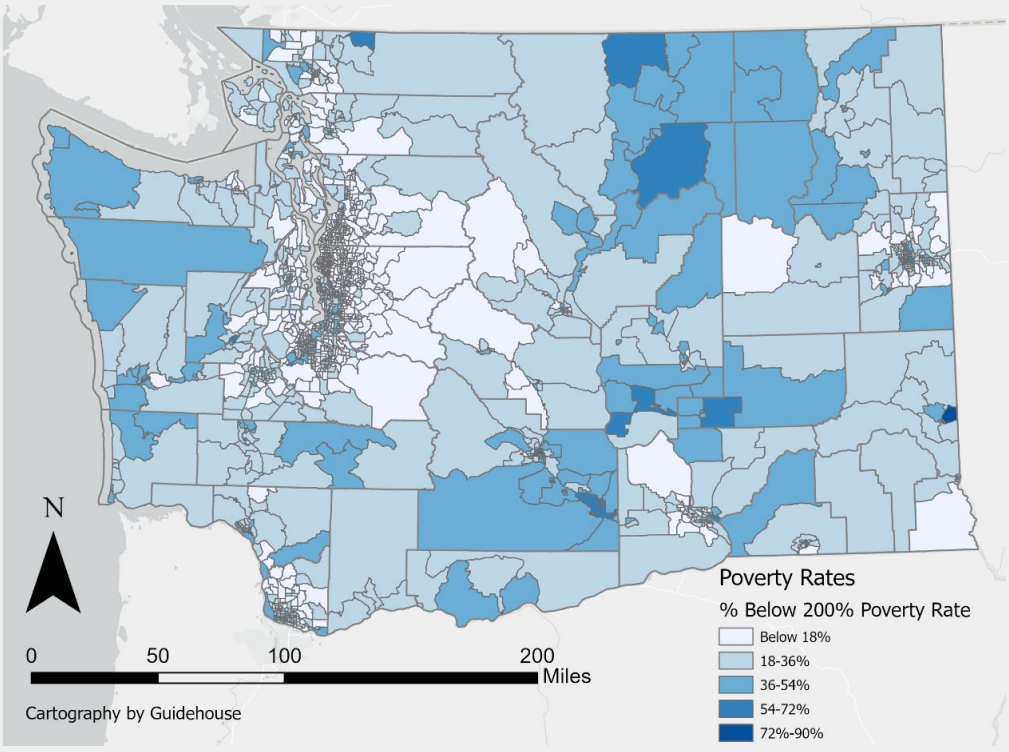
Organization Names		Asset Description	Asset Type	Covered Populations[172]
TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk (Equity in Education Coalition)	A program that provides free multi-lingual, multi-cultural technical support to Washington residents to help them engage in a virtual environment. Helpdesk technicians provide technical guidance, digital navigation support, and connections to other community resources, such as telehealth calls, and online access to food, rental assistance, and socio-emotional supports. The program supports all community members including parents, students, and aging individuals. [180]	Digital Navigator Program	All	
WSU-Extension 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.[181]	Digital Literacy Program	All	
Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instructure's (OSPI's) Digital Equity and Inclusion Grants	A grant program aimed at supporting digital learning environments by allocating state funds to grow and support 1:1 device program, provide access to training in inclusionary practices, and more.[182]	Digital Literacy Program	All except incarcerated individuals	

[180] TechConnect Washington (n.d.). Accessed at: https://techconnectwa.org/
[181] Washington State University (n.d.), 4-H Tech Changemakers. Accessed at: Tech Changemakers | Spokane County | Washington State University (wsu.edu)
[182] OSPI (2023), Digital Equity and Inclusion Grant. Accessed at: https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/grants-grant-management/digital-equity-and-inclusion-grant

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.

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. As **Map 4** shows, this is particularly relevant in areas where a high proportion of the population live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. 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 Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (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 a Federal Communications Commission 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. **Figure 3** 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.

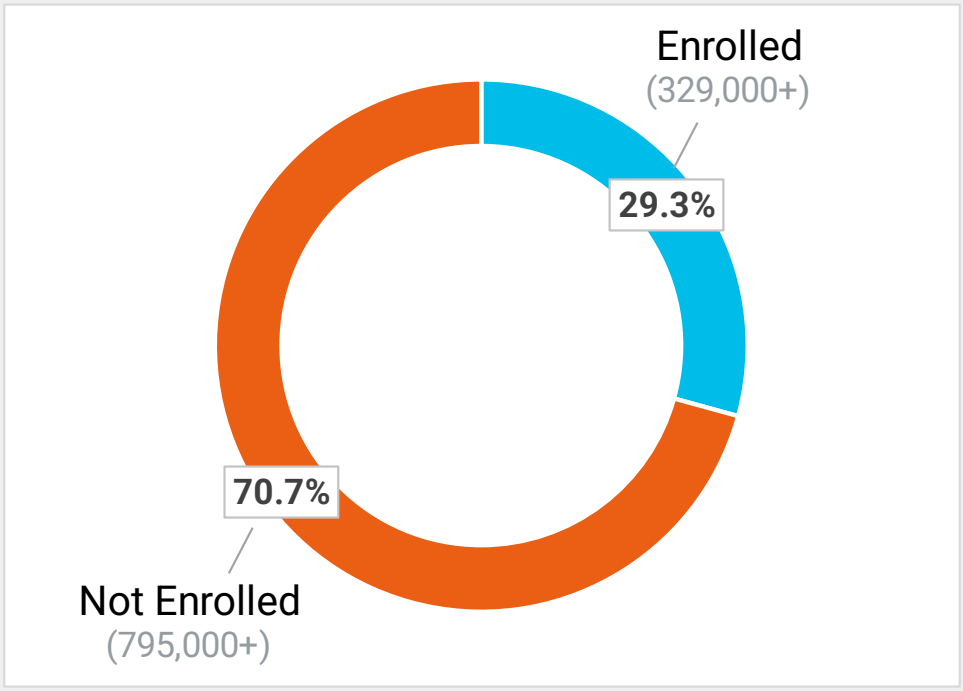


Figure 3: Estimated percent of eligible households enrolled in ACP as of November 2023

Source: Education SuperHighway Affordable Connectivity Dashboard November 2023.

Although the ACP is the largest federal program for subsidizing broadband subscriptions, it is not the sole program for providing a discounted broadband service and equipment program to consumers throughout the state, as outlined in **Table 25** below.

Table 25: Examples of Broadband Affordability Programs Throughout Washington

Organization Name	Asset Description	Asset Eligibility	Asset Type
Affordable Connectivity Program	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 one-time 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.[183]	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 services recipient or have an annual income no greater than $54,000.[184]	Discount Program
Internet Essentials Program from Comcast	The program provides download speeds up to 50 megabits per second (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.[185]	Discount Program

[183] 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/

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

[185] 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 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Apple Health (Medicaid), or other federal assistance programs.[186]	Subsidy Program
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 qualify for the Seattle Utilities Discount Program, low-income subsidized housing, or those who have a child who qualifies for the free or reduced school lunch program.[187]	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. As of November 2023, 329,000 were enrolled.[188] Despite its many benefits, only about 29% of households eligible for ACP enrolled in the program.[189] There is also uncertainty about what will happen if and/or when the ACP program funding runs out if no additional funding is approved by Congress, which is forecasted for April 2024. The WSBO and DEU are having conversations with partners about how to address affordability challenges if additional ACP funding is not approved. The FCC has issued Wind-Down guidance with critical information and estimated dates.[190]

[186]Universal Service Administrative Co. (n.d.), Lifeline Support. Accessed at: https://www.lifelinesupport.org/
[187]Wave (n.d.), Simply Internet. Accessed at: https://wavesimplyinternet.com/
[188] Universal Service Administrative Co. (November 2023), ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker. Accessed at: https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#enrollment-by-state
[189] Ibid.
[190] Federal Communications Commission (2024). Accessed at: ACP_Wind-down_Fact_Sheet_Final.pdf (fcc.gov).

Supplementing state and local government outreach efforts, some private ISPs in Washington were also implementing programs intended to increase ACP enrollment. For example, Comcast announced that residents can 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.[191] 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 promoted the ACP to eligible constituents and provided them with the information needed to apply to the program.

In addition to state subsidy and discount programs, recent changes to state law now allows 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.[192] This expansion of services that PUDs and ports 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 offered by 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.[193] 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.

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 Jefferson County's PUD #1 low-income benefits, meaning some low-income customers could receive 150/150 Mbps internet for only $15 per month. Additional information on other planned affordability programs from PUDs, port districts, and tribal and local government entities is included in **Appendix 7.4**.

[191] 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/

[192] 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

[193] 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/

Ultimately, there are a range of programs and initiatives underway in Washington state that the WSBO and the DEU 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 and low-cost plans, 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 and the DEU 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, 75.5% of the population falls within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) definition of a "covered population." Racial and ethnic minority populations and rural populations make up the largest covered populations within the state, as **Figure 4** shows.[194] In an effort to hear directly from each population about their needs and experiences of accessing the internet, the WSBO collaborated with community partners, WSU-Extension, and state, tribal, and local government representatives, to partner with or conduct more than 80 engagement events. These engagements took place at local meeting spaces, schools, buses, parking lots, and on Zoom and Teams to meet communities where they gather and to hear from those who 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**.

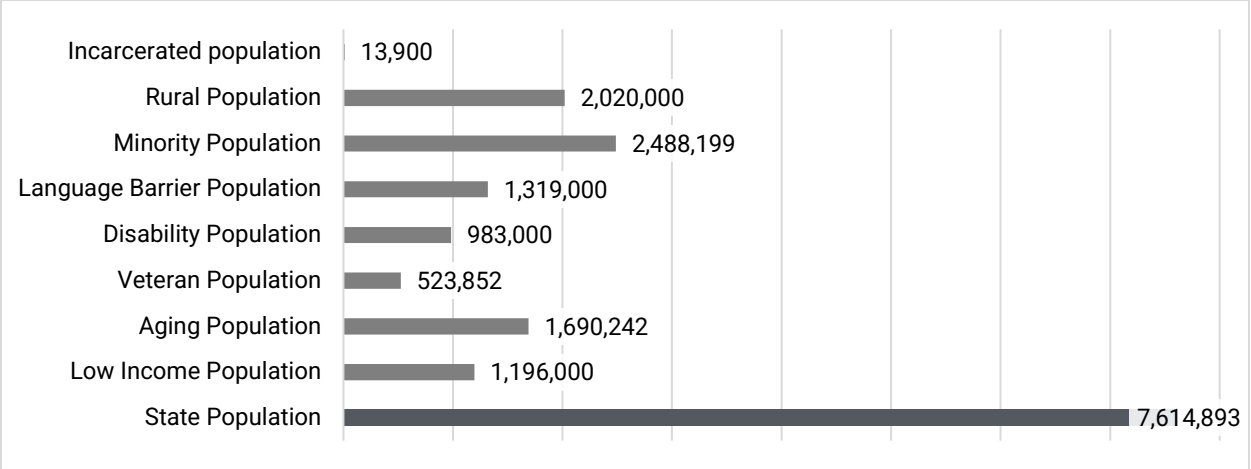


Figure 4: Washington's Covered Populations[195]

[194] US Census defines racial minorities as those who identify as a race other than White alone or as Hispanic or Latino of any race.
[195] U.S Census (2023), Digital Equity Act Population Viewer. Accessed at: https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42. Note: This table does not include youth in foster care and those experiencing housing instability. Those populations are specific to Washington state legislation not included in the Digital Equity NOFO. Individuals may be members of more than one covered population.

Based on the information gathered at these in-person and online engagements, along with data provided in CAPs 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 the result of historical, political, and/or economic policies affecting almost all covered populations.
- **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. Individuals may belong to more than one covered population category, and everyone has unique challenges that can impact their experience with broadband and digital skills. For example, gender and sexual orientation-specific identities are not included in the definition of "covered populations" but can contribute to intersectional social and economic barriers. Where identified, intersectional needs (needs that are compounded based on overlapping identities) are included in the analysis. The intersectional needs are non-exhaustive. 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 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; 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 CAPs 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 geographic terrain, population density, and proximity to infrastructure assets contribute to the price Washington consumers pay for broadband service, 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 group participants felt that broadband service within their community

was expensive, making broadband service seem like more of a luxury than an essential service 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 barriers to enrollment due to the complicated application process. 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 subsidy, 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, only approximately 329,000 were enrolled as of November 2023.[196]

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 are now estimated to be sometime in April 2024 by the FCC.[197] Therefore, for affordability to be promoted and sustainable, it is incumbent upon ISPs to offer low-cost 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 if ISPs increase 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." Washington residents, especially those in rural areas, have little recourse if their provider increases the price. Many 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*

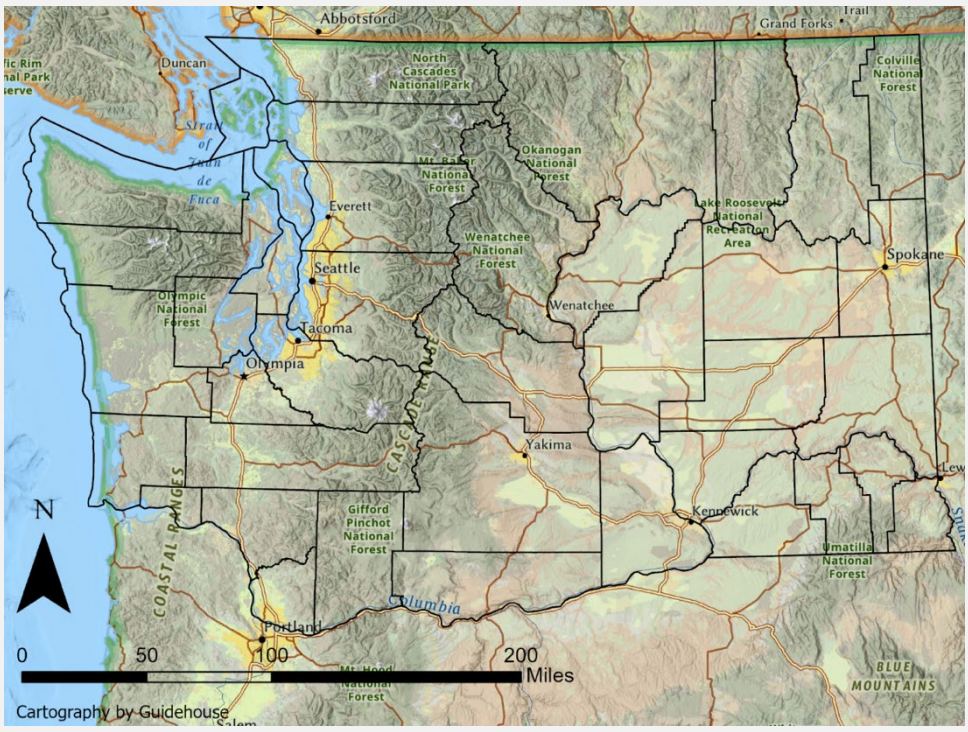
Lastly, there are Washington residents who experience unreliable service, including service disruptions, network congestion, and outages. Many focus group participants expressed that even if they upgrade their service, or pay for the next tier of speed, that they are still left with constant disruption.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

[196] Universal Service Administrative Co. (November 2023), ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker. Accessed at: https://www.usac.org/about/affordable-connectivity-program/acp-enrollment-and-claims-tracker/#enrollment-by-state
[197] [197] Federal Communications Commission (2024). Accessed at: ACP_Wind-down_Fact_Sheet_Final.pdf (fcc.gov).

have issues with it. Technicians come out and there are still issues after that."

NEED RESILIENT 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 appear to be the more viable option in Pacific County. Since Pacific County's topography also includes mountainous landscape with heavily forested areas, dense canopy cover, numerous wetlands, and geologic hazard areas, any construction project here require significant planning and expensive hardening of in-ground broadband infrastructure.[198] **Map 5** below illustrates the topography of the state.



Map 5: Topographic Map of Washington State

Source: Esri's National Geographic base map.

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

On the opposite side of the state, Asotin County's completely different topography 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, which limits the viability of aerial infrastructure. Underground fiber optic and pole installations are also challenging due to underlying basalt rock formations.[199] Ultimately, Washington's diverse topography is an obstacle to building broadband infrastructure and requires additional review and careful planning when expanding broadband infrastructure due to varying construction requirements.

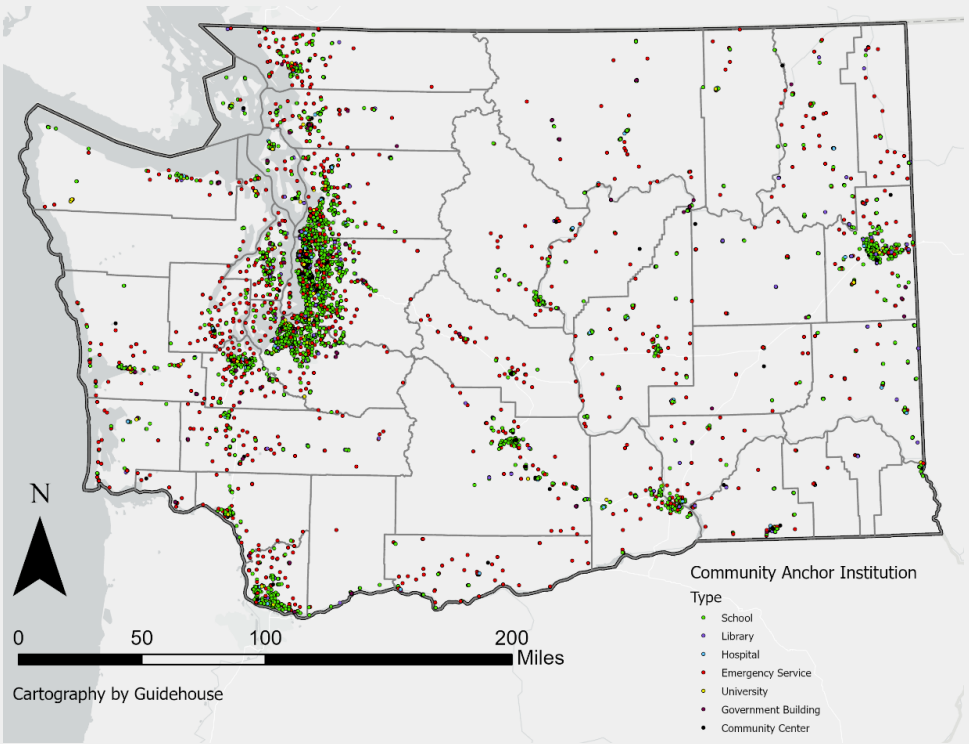
NEED RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

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 6** shows. Many of the events during public engagement were intentionally located in CAIs because of the cross-cutting populations that frequent these spaces. From families with kids needing printouts 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 find out the hours that the soup kitchen is open for the night, CAIs act as critical resources and are 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. The Initial Proposal Volume I defines additional categories of CAIs.

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



Map 6: Community Anchor Institutions in Washington

Source: Analysis of Washington state data as of 2015.

Many of the BATs applauded their CAIs for providing digital equity services, but also stated that many institutions are understaffed and under-resourced. Skamania County's Community Action Plan 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.[200] This is shown in many of the other CAPs linked in **Appendix 7.3.** 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 hotspot programs, yet the county identified a need to expand resources so that all schools within their district can provide this critical resource.[201] Libraries, community and technical colleges, and CBOs can also offer computers and 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 address 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

[200] Skamania County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Skamania_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[201] Kitsap County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Kitsap_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box

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.[202]

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.

The Samish Indian Nation Community Action Plan, like many other CAPs, 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.[203] 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 areas, 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.[204] 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.

There are also adoption barriers that affect multiple populations. There is a potential adoption barrier related to individuals who are unaware of the benefits of having a home broadband internet connection. For example, the NTIA's Internet Use Survey results from 2021 indicated that of the 24 million offline households, a majority (58%), responded that they had no interest or need to be online. Anecdotally, several of the individuals we surveyed during community engagement did not see the value of broadband internet, although they indicated that they did connect occasionally using smart phones.

Some of the needs and barriers that are most salient for specific covered populations related to broadband access, affordability, and adoption are described in the following sections.

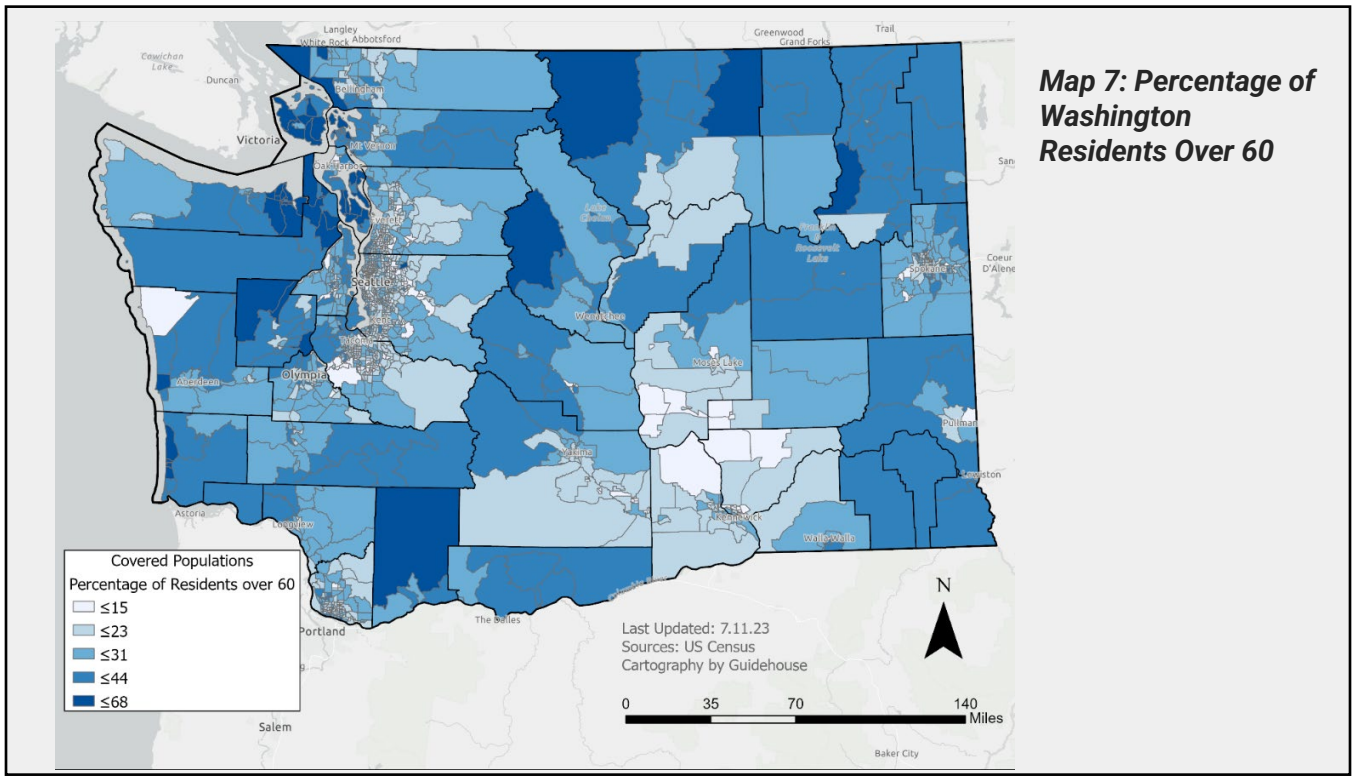
[202] Stevens County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Stevens_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[203] Samish Indian Nation (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Samish_Indian_Nation_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[204] Grant County (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Grant_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box

3.2.2 Covered Population Needs Assessment

Some of the most pressing needs identified specific to each covered population are described in this section. However, intersectional identities can result in these needs compounding or intersecting across covered populations, impacting people's day-to-day lived experiences. The subsections below each focus on describing needs for a specific covered population. Strategies, objectives, and activities discussed in **Chapter 5** are intended to address the needs of all covered populations.

3.2.2.1 Aging Individuals

In Washington state, 22% of residents are considered aging individuals, over the age of 60.[205] Aging individuals in Washington are predominantly white (81%) and often receive the majority of their income from Social Security (74%).[206] A majority of aging individuals in Washington are also considered low-income based on the federal poverty rate (86%). **Map 7** and **Table 26** highlight the counties where there are large concentrations of aging individuals.[207]



Map 7: Percentage of Washington Residents Over 60

Table 26: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of People Aged 60+

County	% 60+ Years Old
Jefferson	47.1

[205] The term "aging individuals" and the definition as individuals who are over the age of 60 come from the Digital Equity Act – State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program NOFO. Accessed at: DE PLANNING GRANT NOFO.pdf (doc.gov).
[206] U.S. Census Bureau (2023). ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/search?ds=ACSPUMS1Y2022&vv=AGEP&cv=RAC1P&rv=ucgid
[207] Data pulled from Digital Equity Act Population viewer. Accessed at: https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42

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

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[208]

Broadband subscription rates	Device ownership rates
74% of individuals 60+ years have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide.	81% of individuals 60+ own a laptop or computer compared to 87% statewide.

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 2020.[209] In Washington state, phishing scams target aging individuals by duplicating official documents or government websites. An older adult 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, older adults need more protections when using the internet.

Lack of online security has also left older adults reluctant to use online resources. Online shopping has increased over the years with about 80% of the U.S. population shopping online. However, some older adults 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 older adults represent the smallest demographic of online shoppers (28%) suggesting that barriers such as safety, level of comfort 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 older adults mentioned that having fast and reliable internet access provides them 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

[208] Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded.
[209] 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

in with family and friends, as well as controlling home security centers. In rural areas with multiple dead zones for mobile phone coverage or costly landline service, older adults need internet access to stay connected to critical information like wildfire alerts.

Aging individuals 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 older adults to choose where they live while still having access to the services that they need.

NEED TO AFFORD INTERNET ON A FIXED INCOME

Currently, U.S. households pay a median of $75 per month for fixed internet service.[210] With 73% of older adults 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, older adults may have difficulties enrolling in the program due to a complicated multi-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 older adults challenged by 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 older adults 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. For example, if ACP is not renewed, this could create a disruption in service for households who cannot absorb the additional plan cost.

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 older adults commented on needing improved digital skills to feel more comfortable and safer online, yet many spoke about their difficulties 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." In addition to learning skills related to using devices and technology, a computer literacy teacher in a Seattle focus group discussed the physical mobility challenges and decreased vision that many older adults he was teaching faced. Older students often required his assistance to adjust settings to make text larger on phones or computers and assistance adjusting features on smart phones for individuals who had hand tremors.

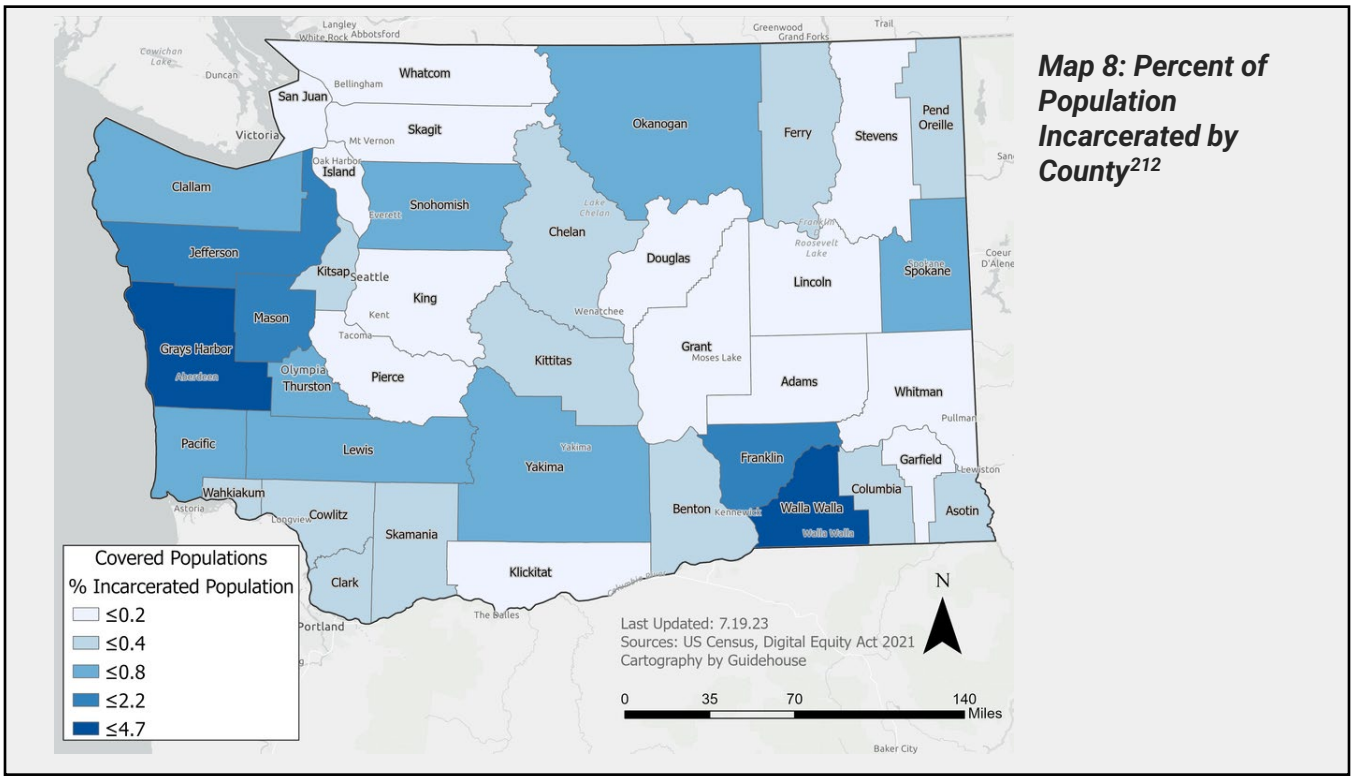
Digital skills are essential for participating in today's digital society through activities such as searching and applying for jobs, accessing benefits, or engaging with friends and family on social networks. While digital upskilling programs exist at community anchor institutions within Washington, it may be difficult for some older adults to access services. During public engagement, many older adults expressed the desire for in-person digital skill training to have a

[210] Consumer Reports (2022). "Fight for Fair Internet: Consumer Reports white paper on broadband pricing." Accessed at: https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/research/fight-for-fair-internet-consumer-reports-white-paper-on-broadband-pricing/?clreqid=df8f1a70-6745-4591-a0f1-6b561fc1ed5d&kbid=117828

hands-on learning experience. However, as **Map 7** previously displayed, there are higher percentages of older adults in rural areas of Washington state, 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 institutions. Many of the Community Action Plans identified assets such as senior centers as trusted places where older adults gather, but many do not have dedicated staff or equipment to provide digital skill trainings.

3.2.2.2 Incarcerated Individuals

Washington state had 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.[211] **Map 8** 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 8: Percent of Population Incarcerated by County[212]

Table 27: 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

[212] 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.[213] In 2017, the incarceration rate of Black adults in Washington was more than five times that of white adults.[214] 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.[215]

Through focus groups, the WSBO was able to engage with formerly incarcerated individuals to identify needs within the facilities.[216] 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 discussing technology in correctional facilities.

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[217]

Internet availability	Device access

The Washington State DOC has implemented an Off State Network (OSN) that allows incarcerated individuals restricted access through computer labs located in all correctional facilities except two. *	• Individuals with permissible custody levels can use tablets provided by a private provider, although connectivity is restricted to approved applications.
	• Access to computers (desktop or laptop) is typically restricted to computer labs or law libraries. Number of computers connected to the OSN:
	  ○ Reentry Centers: 31
	  ○ Education in Prisons: 88
	  ○ Law Library (LexisNexis online): 100 (average 20 per law library with 5 currently online)
	  ○ Support Clerks: 2

**Note: There are plans to extend the OSN to all facilities, and as of writing, the network and computers connected to the OSN are still being expanded.*

[213] Vera Institute of Justice (2019), Incarceration Trends in Washington. Accessed at https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-washington.pdf
[214] 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
[215] 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/
[216] Note: Due to restrictions related to human subject research requirements governed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the WSBO did not conduct research with currently incarcerated individuals.
[217] Washington State Department of Corrections (2024). Email from February 1, 2024.

NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE INTERNET CONNECTION WITHIN FACILITIES

President Joe Biden has said that the majority of justice-involved 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.[218] Currently, access to internet is restricted for incarcerated individuals, as there are concerns about incarcerated individuals using the internet to conduct illegal activity, outside of regulated educational opportunities.[219] As our society becomes increasingly internet-dependent, the internet is 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 reentry purposes when so much of modern life is carried out digitally. This will require a delicate balance between ensuring the safety of the incarcerated individuals and Washington communities, and providing incarcerated individuals the opportunity to learn, communicate with friends and family, and prepare for reentry into society.

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.[220] 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."[221]

> "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 improve access to affordable internet services for incarcerated individuals to stay in communication with friends and family.[222]

[218] 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/
[219] Department of Corrections. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/corrections/incarceration/technology-provider.htm
[220] 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
[221] Komonews (2019), Incarcerated students in Washington have access to Internet for first time.
[222] Department of Corrections (2022), Press Release. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/news/2022/05032022p.htm

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 may be limited in number, only available at certain times of the day, and highly regulated and under surveillance.[223] A formerly incarcerated 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 a few computers, the lines can get long.

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 have 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.[224] 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 current digital devices to optimize their ability to engage with and become accustomed to the outside world after release.

The DOC renegotiated a contract for individual technology services to "lower costs and expand services" into all state prisons, initiating the Individual Technology Services program.[225] 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 include applications such as podcasts, Law Library, and a suite of educational and reentry resources. Full implementation to all facilities statewide was completed by the end of 2023.

While a tablet program removes long lines at computer centers by providing a device to each person, tablets 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 AVAILABLE 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.[226] 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 SBCTC, Washington's community and technical colleges, and

[223] Department of Corrections (2021), Bridging a Technology Gap. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/news/2021/07072021.htm
[224] Pew Research Center (2021), Mobile Fact Sheet. Accessed at: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/
[225] Department of Corrections, Individual Technology Services. Accessed at: https://www.doc.wa.gov/corrections/services/technology.htm
[226] 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/

the Evergreen State College.[227] 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.[228] From 2020–2021, Washington state corrections education increased laptop capacity by 60%, although these laptops work only in an offline internet environment or the OSN.[229] Adult basic education programs are also available in every prison, providing a foundational education in reading, writing, math, and the English language.[230]

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.[231]

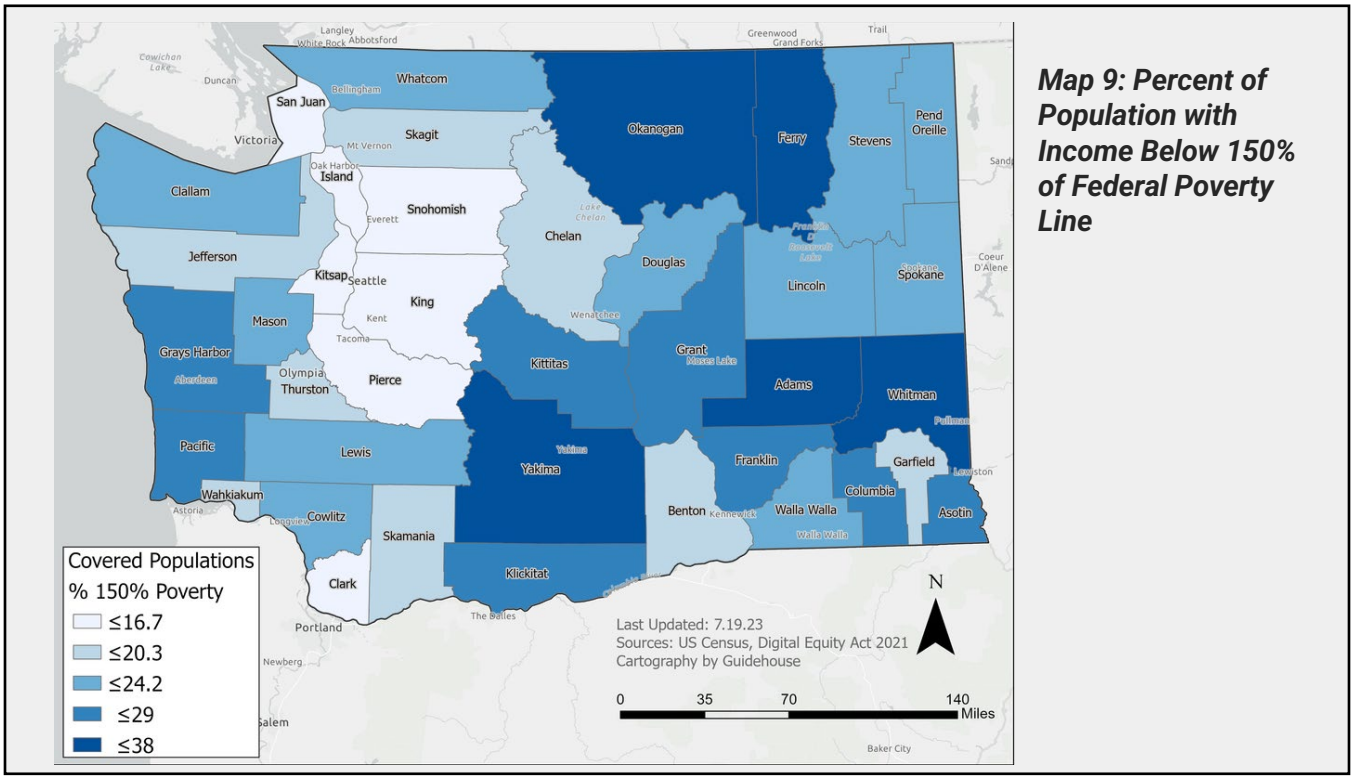
> "[Digital skills] are all skills that have become life skills and if you don't have support [when you're out of prison…], then tough luck."
>
> –Tacoma focus group participant

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 up-to-date technology and internet access for training to enable navigating resources, researching, and staying connected with loved ones can help ease the transition from incarceration and reduce recidivism.

[227] Washington Community and Technical Colleges (2023), Washington College in Prisons Program. Accessed at: https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programsservices/prisons/.
[228] 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
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.
[231] 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.[232] The Census Bureau uses a set of income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty.[233] 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 9** and **Table 28** show the distribution of households with an income below 150% of the Federal Poverty Line across the state of Washington and the top five counties with the highest percentage.



Map 9: Percent of Population with Income Below 150% of Federal Poverty Line

Table 28: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of People Living Below 150% of the Federal Poverty Line[234]

County	% Below 150% of the Federal Poverty Line
Adams	38
Whitman	37.8
Okanogan	32.4
Yakima	32.4
Ferry	30.8

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

[233] 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

[234] Data pulled from Digital Equity Act Population viewer. Accessed at: https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42

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.

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[235]

Broadband subscription rates	Device ownership rates
• 75% of individuals receiving Medicaid or other government assistance have access to broadband compared to 82% statewide. • 29% of eligible households enrolled in ACP.	• 78% of individuals receiving Medicaid or other government assistance own a laptop or desktop compared to 87% statewide.

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. 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 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,

"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

[235] Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded.

communicate with friends and family, or use social media when using lower speed internet packages available for low-income families.

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 numerous 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 CAPs 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."[236]

Awareness building is essential for low-income households to utilize digital inclusion assets and resources that are publicly available, as 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.[237] Through public engagement the WSBO 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 immigrant small business owners who spoke at the Spokane listening session, "My community relies on the phone. That is their main source of internet."

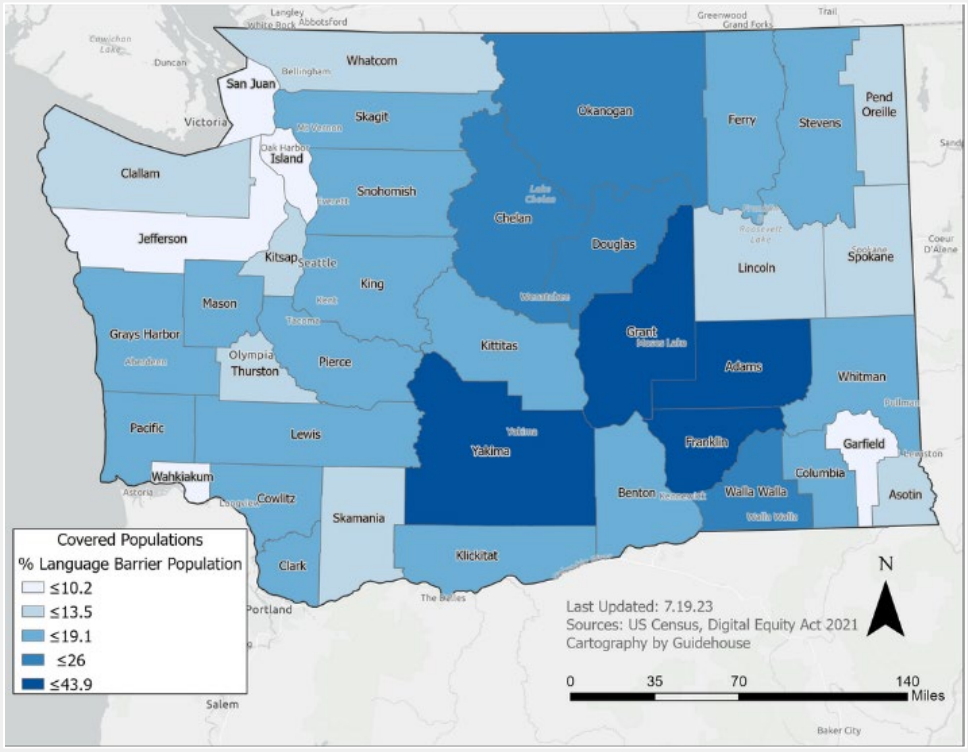
Cellular data plans are typically more affordable and available for low-income individuals, and the average smartphone also costs less than the average computer or laptop. For individuals using the internet daily to communicate, access social media, find directions, or lookup information, a smartphone 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

[236] Walla Walla County (2023), Community Action Plans. Accessed at: Walla_Walla_County_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[237] 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/

especially crucial for conducting work, education, and telehealth related activities and are not always included in device gifting programs.

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, just over 20% of its population speak a language other than English at home, and close to 8% of individuals speak English less than very well, according to the ACS 5-Year Estimates data from the U.S. Census.[238] That amounts to nearly 1.5 million individuals speaking a language other than English at home, and over 547,000 individuals who have limited English language proficiency.[239] **Map 10** shows the percent of each county's population that has a language barrier.

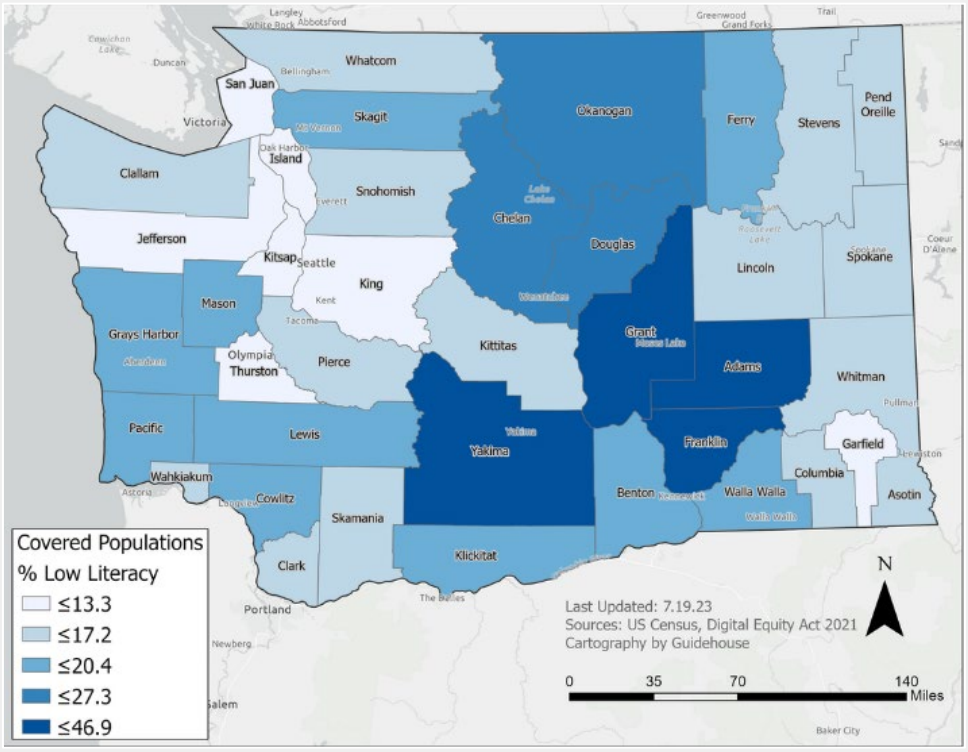


Map 10: Percent of Population with a Language Barrier by County

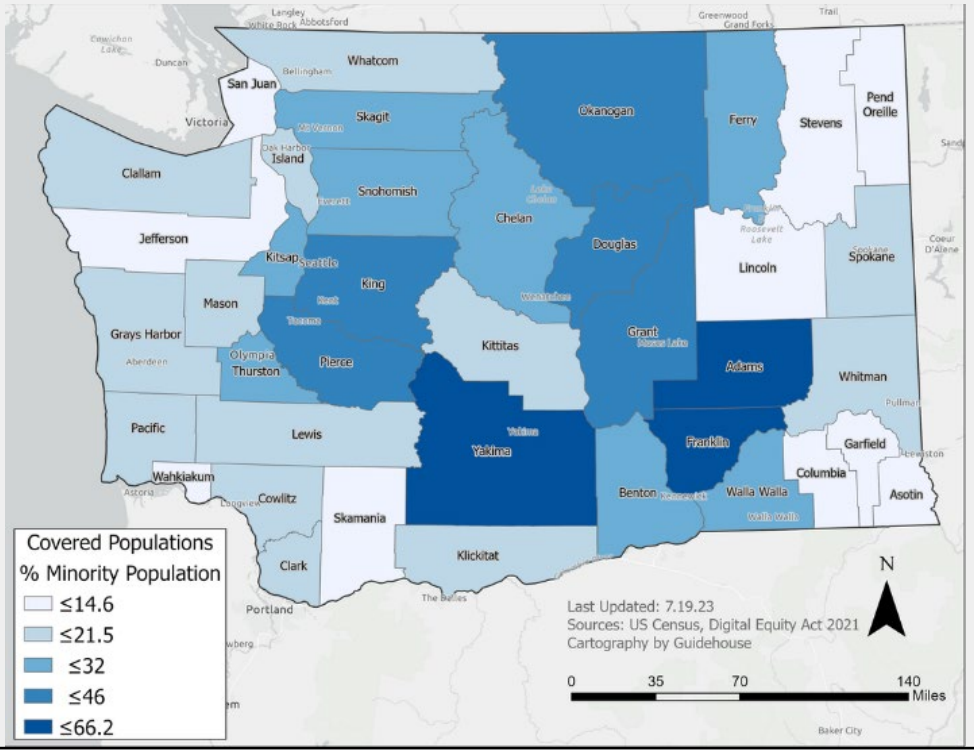
Additionally, while there are native-English speakers with low literacy rates, there is a notable intersection between low literacy rates and limited English proficiency due to multiple factors that may impede this population's ability to access resources. This may include minimal or inefficient schooling, 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. Parents who are illiterate cannot teach their children to read, increasing the likelihood that a child will be illiterate as well. **Map 10, Map 11,** and **Map 12** show how the percentage of a population that is low literacy by county also coincides with counties with the highest percentage of immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities such as Yakima County, Adams County, and Franklin County.

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

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



Map 11: Percent of Population with Low Literacy by County



Map 12: Percent of Population That is a Racial or Ethnic Minority by County

Low literacy, or limited ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written texts,[240] affects about 18% of U.S. adults. Low literacy rates are higher among Hispanic individuals, Black individuals, foreign-born individuals, and low-income individuals.[241] According to the Center for Immigration Studies, 41% of immigrants score at or below the lowest level of English literacy.[242] 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. 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.

> "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

Additionally, many entities, from government agencies to nonprofits and private businesses, use websites and digital services to provide information and services to the public.[243] 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 often not the case.[244] The following gaps have been identified for individuals with language barriers.

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[245]

Broadband subscription rates	Device ownership rates
• 85% of individuals who speak English "very well" have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide. • 80% of individuals who speak English "well" have broadband internet service. • 74% of individuals who speak English "not well" have broadband internet service.	• 87% of individuals who speak English "very well" own a computer or laptop compared to 87% statewide. • 80% of individuals who speak English "well" own a computer or laptop. • 74% of individuals who speak English "not well" own a computer or laptop.

[240] Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (n.d.). Accessed at: https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/measure.asp
[241] Ballard Brief (2017), Illiteracy Among Adults in the U.S. Accessed at: https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/illiteracy-among-adults-in-the-us
[242] Center for Immigration Studies (2017), Immigrant Literacy. Accessed at: https://cis.org/Immigrant-Literacy-Self-Assessment-vs-Reality
[243] 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
[244] Limited English Proficiency Committee, (2021)
[245] Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded.

Broadband subscription rates	Device ownership rates
• 62% of individuals who speak English "not at all" have broadband internet service.	• 47% of individuals who speak English "not at all" own a computer or laptop.

NEED TO PROMOTE AWARENESS AND EXPAND DIGITAL LITERACY TRAINING IN ADULT ENGLISH LITERACY PROGRAMS

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, High School Plus, and integrate digital literacy instruction into basic skills classes.[246, 247] Studies show the advantages of developing digital literacy skills alongside English literacy programs. The lack of digital skills inhibits people's ability to succeed in the 21st Century workforce. An estimated 92% of jobs require digital skills.[248] Yet, one-third of workers, particularly those in low- to middle-skilled occupations, do not have the foundational digital skills necessary to progress and thrive in today's careers.[249] Individuals who face language barriers may be unaware of the advantages of simultaneously improving English literacy and digital literacy, and there is an opportunity to continue strengthening the integration of learning opportunities.

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

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 plain language, multilingual translations, and translation service upon the request of individuals trying to communicate with the government. Plain 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 language should also be clear, concise, and free of technical jargon that the average reader may not understand whenever possible.[250] During the WSBO's public engagement period, Spanish-speaking participants in Sunnyside expressed their frustration with "*la lengua de abogados*," or

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.

[246] 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
[247] U.S. Department of Education (2013). Accessed at: https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf.
[248] National Skills Coalition (2023), Closing the Digital Skill Divide. Accessed at: https://nationalskillscoalition.org/resource/publications/closing-the-digital-skill-divide/
[249] National Skills Coalition (2023)
[250] Executive Order 05-03, Plain Talk. Access at: Executive Order 05-03: Plain Talk (wa.gov)

"lawyer language." One participant explicitly said, "Things are too long and would take a whole day to understand."

Washington state is working to help improve language access across a variety of sectors. For example, 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 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.[251] 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 multilingual websites are necessary for people with language barriers to enable their access to critical public services.

NEED FOR MULTI-LINGUAL TECHNICAL SUPPORT SERVICES FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Individuals with language barriers often 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 multilingual, multicultural help desk staffed by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) technicians. Technicians help callers navigate the internet, telehealth calls, and online access to food, rental assistance, and socio-emotional supports. Multilingual 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 understanding different subscription plans. Multilingual technical 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 hinder peoples' ability to enjoy the benefits of being connected to the online world. Multilingual technical 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

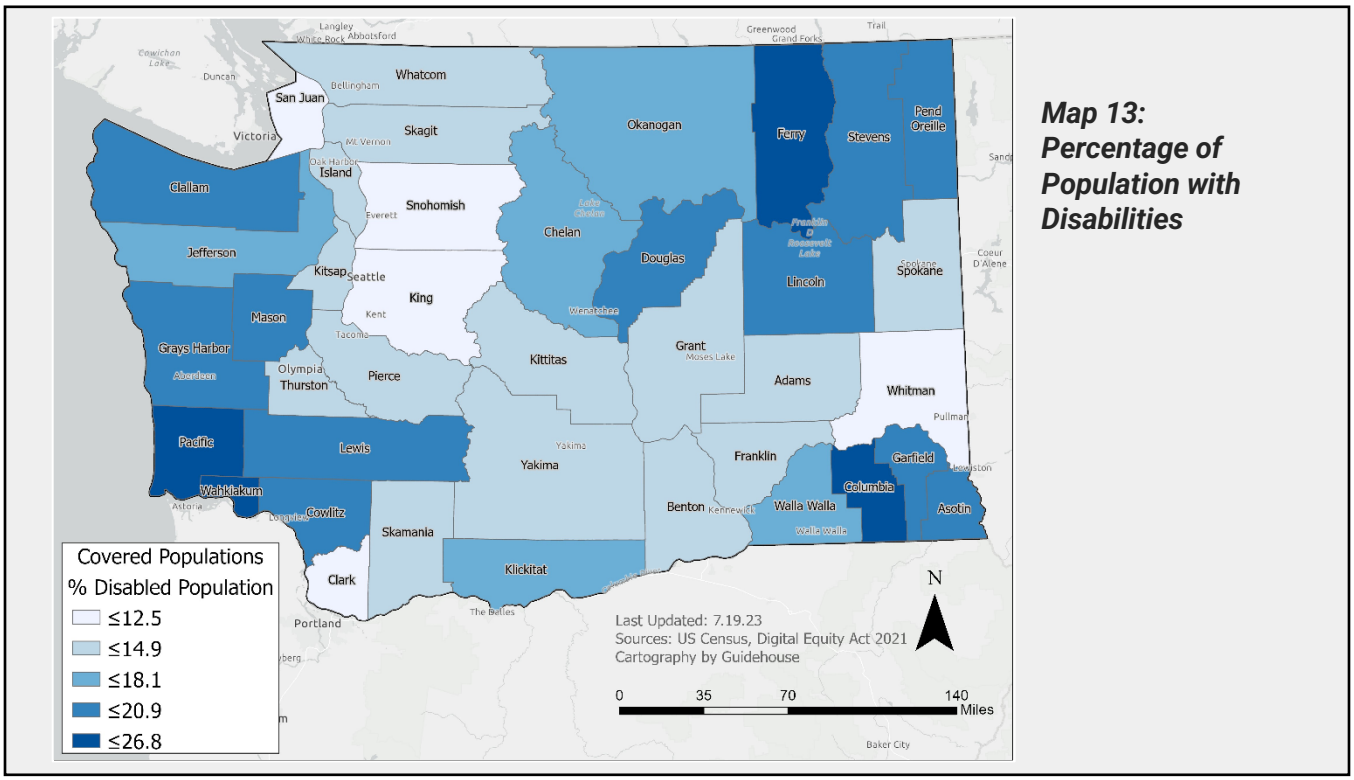
> "My bill increased from $100 to $175 without me knowing because my contract had expired. I didn't know how to fix it or fight it because my English isn't that good."
>
> –Aberdeen focus group participants

[251] 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

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 multilingual technical support services and application information from ISPs acts as a serious barrier for individuals with limited English proficiency.

3.2.2.5 Individuals with Disabilities

According to census data, individuals with disabilities make up nearly 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.[252] However, a 2012 report from the National Disability Rights Network stated that due to accessibility challenges, the disability community is undercounted and misrepresented in the census.[253] 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.[254] This is also visible in the discrepancy between the estimated percentage of adults in Washington with a disability noted in Section 3.1.1.5 (nearly 25%) based on data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.



Map 13: Percentage of Population with Disabilities

Table 29: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of Disabled Population[255]

County	% Disabled Population
Ferry	26.8

[252] U.S. Census Bureau, Disability Status. Accessed at: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/note/US/DIS010219.
[253] 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
[254] 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
[255] Data pulled from Digital Equity Act Population viewer. Accessed at: https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42

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

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[256]

Broadband subscription rates	Device ownership rates
• 71% of individuals with a disability have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide.	• 75% of individuals with a disability own a laptop or computer compared to 87% statewide.

NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

People living with disabilities face unique challenges to accessing the internet including websites, mobile applications, and other information and communication technologies and services including hardware and software, 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.

> "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 with vision impairment

Individuals with disabilities may also need additional support to feel comfortable using technology and building their digital skills, or conversely, they may face encounters where they must explain how assistive technology works to others. While support is often available at libraries or other community anchor institutions, staff need to ensure they have resources and training to assist with the specific needs of people with disabilities. This could include hardware such as computers and keyboards with large font, and software such as text readers and screen dimmers.[257]

Even with access to assistive technology and training on how to use devices, another need is for websites and applications to be designed to meet technical accessibility standards such as the

[256] Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded.
[257] Screen dimmers are useful for populations that suffer from seizers and can be induced from bright or flashing websites.

international recognized Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, which is also referenced in Washington's Office of the Chief Information Officer's Policy #188 on Accessibility.

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.[258] 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.

During a focus group held to engage with individuals with vision impairment, 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."

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

Assistive technology 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. Assistive technology can be low-tech, such as communication boards, or high-tech, such as special-purpose computers, screen readers and communication programs, special switched keyboards, or applications that can act as "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 and insufficient training on how to use assistive technologies can often act as a barrier for individuals with disabilities trying to fully engage with the digital world. While the state of Washington already has state programs and funds available to assist individuals with disabilities with acquiring assistive technology, there remains a need for more resources to be allocated to those most in need. As an example, the DSHS offers three assistive technology and assessment practitioners — who help with assessing the needs of individuals with disabilities attempting to achieve their employment goals by merging assistive technology and vocational rehabilitation training — in their respective regions of Eastern Washington, Northwest Washington, and Southwest Washington.[259] The University of Washington additionally houses the Washington Assistive Technology Act Program, which provides resources and services to individuals with disabilities

[258] CenturyLink, Programs for customer with disabilities. Accessed at: https://www.centurylink.com/aboutus/community/community-development/programs-for-customers-with-disabilities.htm I

[259] Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Assistive Technology Services. Accessed at: Assistive Technology Services | DSHS (wa.gov)

seeking assistive technology, including lending programs.[260] 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 assistive technology to someone's residence.[261] For long-term digital inclusion, every person with a disability should have access to affordable assistive technology and training on how to use the technology.

NEED FOR AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE INTERNET SERVICES TO POWER ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

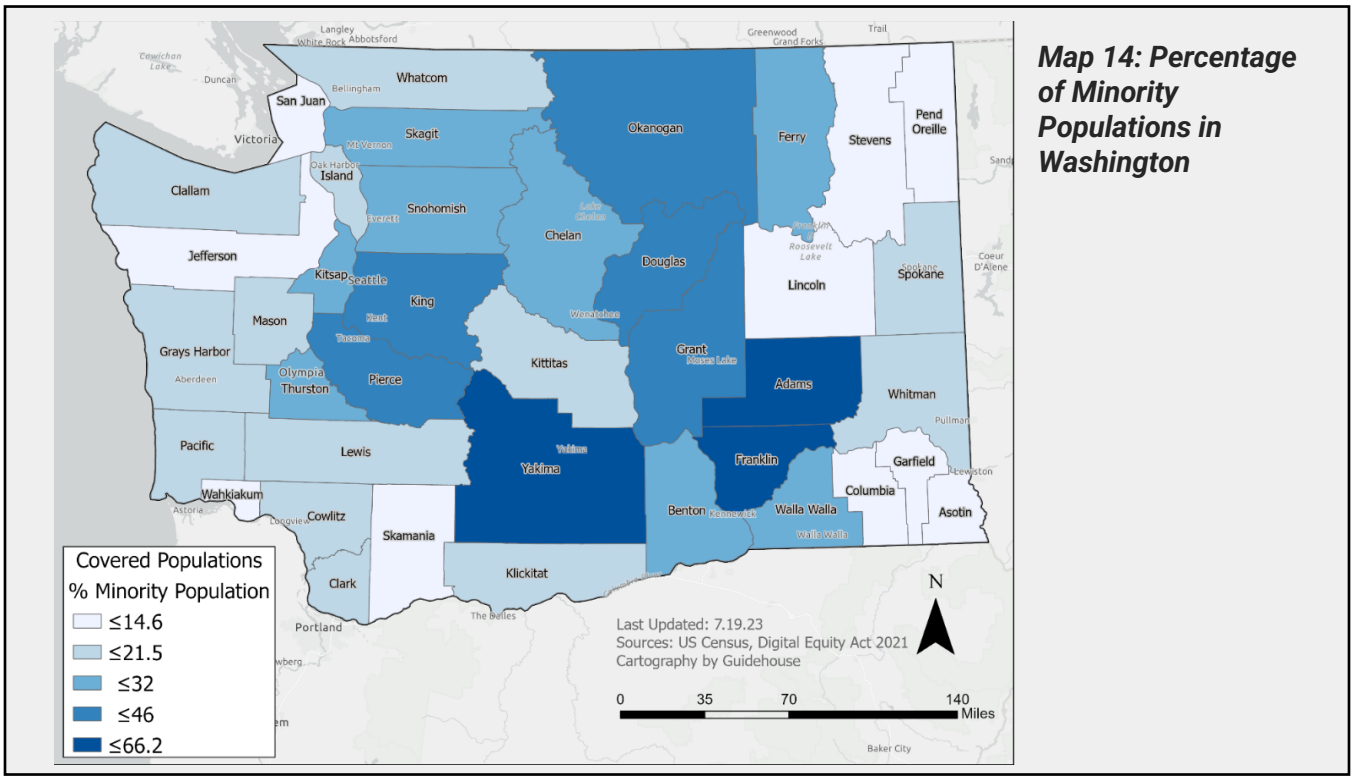
Individuals with disabilities additionally rely extensively on internet connections to connect or enhance the devices they do use as assistive technology. For those who are also low-income, low-cost programs often cannot serve them due to slow internet speeds or network congestion causing lags and buffering. For example, a focus group participant shared, "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 assistive technology to do basic, everyday tasks such as reading, writing, and listening. Many tools require internet connectivity for full functionality. As a participant expressed during a focus group with individuals with vision impairment, "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 internet options 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 with vision impairment

[260] Washington Assistive Technology Act Programs (2023), Technology for Independence. Accessed at: https://watap.org/
[261] Disability Rights Washington (2018), Accessibility & Assistive Technology. Accessed at: https://www.disabilityrightswa.org/resources/resource-category/accessibility-and-at/

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 30** 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 in 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 30: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of Minorities[262]

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

[262] Data pulled from Digital Equity Act Population viewer. Accessed at: https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[263]

Broadband subscription rates	Device ownership rates
• 82% of white individuals have a broadband subscription, compared to a statewide 82%. • 79% of Black or African Americans have a broadband subscription. • 74% of American Indians have a broadband subscription. • 74% of Alaska Natives alone have a broadband subscription. • 70% of American Indian and Alaska Natives have a broadband subscription. • 87% of Asian Americans have a broadband subscription. • 81% of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders have a broadband subscription. • 73% of "some other race alone" have a broadband subscription. • 84% of "two or more races" have a broadband subscription.	• 89% of white individuals own a laptop or computer, compared to 87% statewide. • 82% of Black or African Americans own a laptop or computer. • 86% of American Indians own a laptop or computer. • 82% of Alaska Natives alone own a laptop or computer. • 73% of American Indian and Alaska Natives own a laptop or computer. • 91% of Asian Americans own a laptop or computer. • 72% of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders own a laptop or computer. • 70% of "some other race alone" own a laptop or computer. • 87% of "two or more races" own a laptop or computer.

NEED FOR CULTURALLY SENSITIVE ONLINE FORMS

As previously mentioned, 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

"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

[263] Source: ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded.

that usually feature more characters.[264] Additionally, first or last names with hyphens or other symbols are also rejected which can lead to people needing to "Americanize" 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.[265] Due to their connection and central locations within many communities, barbershops could serve as public Wi-Fi networks, 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 higher percentages of Black (83%), Latino (74%), and Asian (68%) populations attending a religious service at least a few times a year, as compared to their white (66%) counterparts.[266] 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 and create safe and comfortable spaces for digital skills and digital literacy trainings.

NEED FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

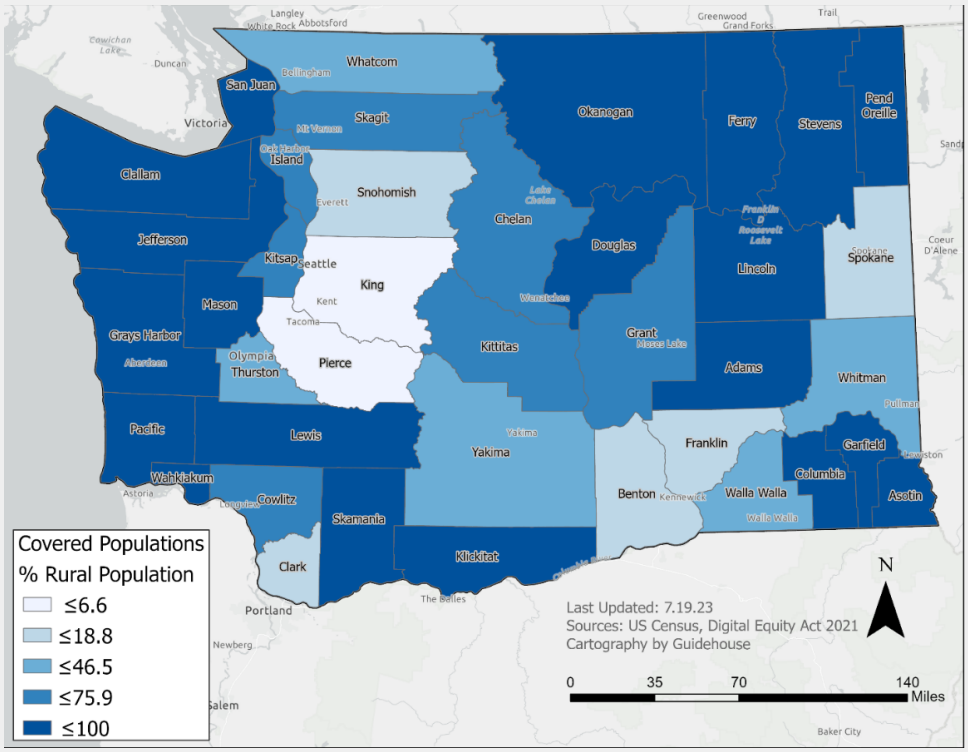
Government agencies need to invest resources into meaningful engagement with tribal governments, Native community-based organizations and residents. Some tribes in Washington, such as the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, have been faced with losing federal recognition, hunting and fishing rights, and rights to their land, resulting in negative impacts to the tribal community's health care and education.[267] Colonialism has been cited as 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.[268] To combat the history of government mistrust, relationship building is essential to create an environment where tribal community members can feel that their contributions are valued, and they are empowered to participate in public engagement

[264] 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
[265] Library of Congress Blogs (2022), Honoring African Americans: Barbering. Accessed in: https://blogs.loc.gov/inside_adams/2022/02/african-americans-barbering/
[266] Pew Research Center, Racial and Ethnic Composition. Accessed at: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/
[267] Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe (2023), Community Action Plan. Accessed at: Jamestown_S_Klallam_Community_Action_Plan.pdf | Powered by Box
[268] United Nations, Fight Racism. Accessed at: https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/vulnerable-groups/indigenous-peoples

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 governments to advocate for their needs. This also includes creating coalitions with neighboring counties to share resources and information. There are opportunities for tribes to continue to cultivate relationships with other governmental entities to assist with expanding digital equity resources. Other tribes want to ensure that the government understands both differences and similarities of the 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington to create a unique strategy that engages in government-to-government partnerships, with an emphasis on respecting tribal sovereignty. Establishing partnerships takes work and communication. Many tribes are willing to engage with the state to provide their communities with the resources they need. The WSBO has an opportunity to listen and co- create to ensure that all Washingtonians can participate equitably in our digital society.

3.2.2.7 Rural Inhabitants

Currently, an estimated 26% of the population in Washington live in a rural area.[269] **Map 15** reflects the percentage of each county's population living in rural areas.



Map 15: Percentage of Rural Population by County

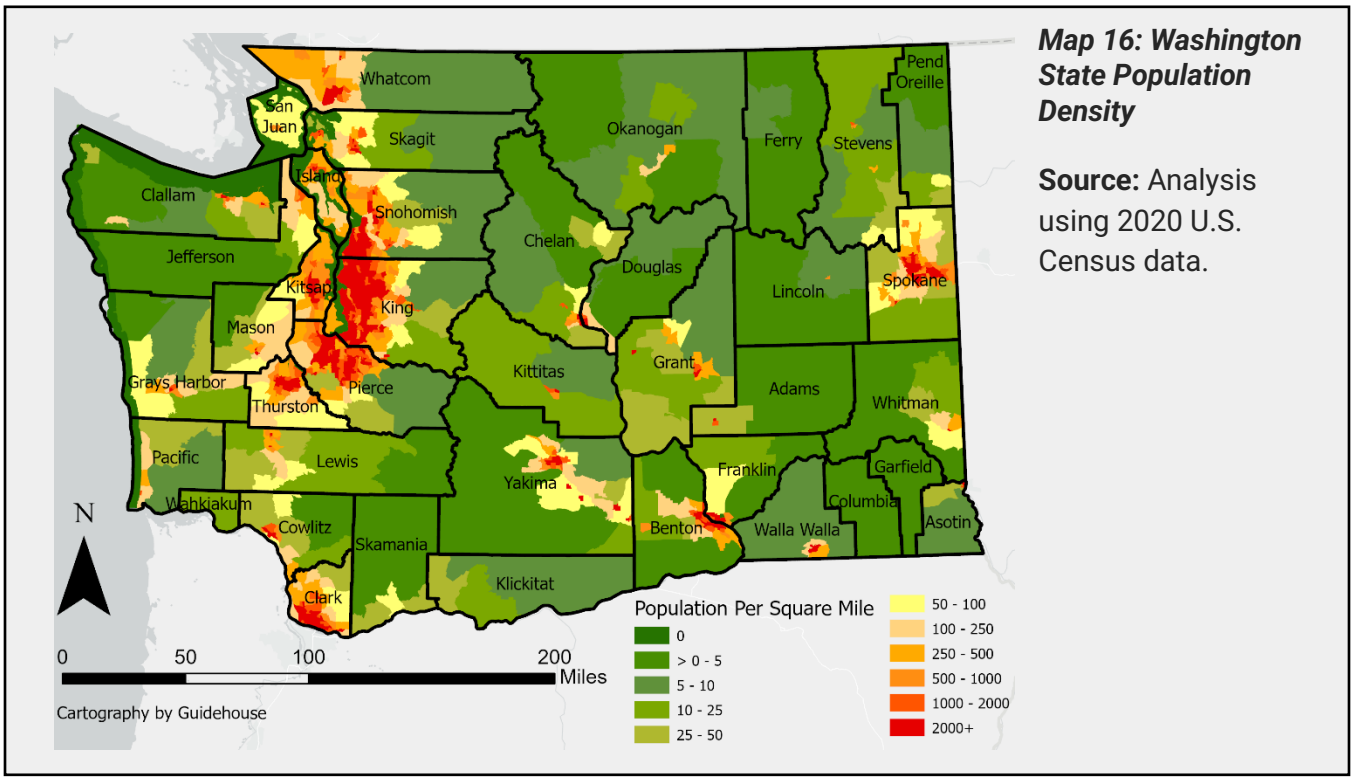
Rural areas in Washington have low population densities as shown in **Table 31** with seven of 39 counties having population densities at or below 10 people per square mile, which can make it economically challenging for ISPs to invest in broadband infrastructure. As demonstrated in **Map 16**, high 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 31: Counties with Population Densities at Or Below Ten People Per Square Mile[270]

County	Population density (People/Mile^2)
Garfield	3
Ferry	3
Columbia	5
Lincoln	5

[269] 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.
[270] Data from 2020 US Census.

County	Population density (People/Mile^2)
Skamania	7
Okanogan	8
Pend Oreille	10



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 without competition. As a result, many rural communities are underserved or unserved. Local governments, PUDs, Port Authorities, and municipalities can play a vital role by encouraging competition and facilitating partnerships to expand services in rural areas.

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[271, 272]

Broadband availability
• 92% of the unserved/underserved locations are in rural areas of the state of Washington. • The majority of Washington state's 348 building locations managed by 60 public library systems are in rural areas (as defined in the Digital Equity NOFO).

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. 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, by saying that, "The population within Forks 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 as 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 can, in turn, stimulate job creation, increase income levels, and boost the overall economy of the rural region. As a participant mentioned

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

– Okanogan listening session participant

[271] The rural boundaries were sourced from: Office of Financial Management, Census Geographic Files. Accessed at: Census geographic files | Office of Financial Management (wa.gov). Underserved location analysis from FCC broadband serviceable location fabric for Washington state as of October 24, 2023. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded.

[272] Washington State Library. Data provided via email on 1/25/2024. Appendix 7.10.

during the Oak Harbor listening session, "there's a real chance of it impacting the potential to increase property value."

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 to ensure that they have the same educational opportunities as their urban counterparts.
- **Healthcare services**: Broadband connectivity also expands the delivery of telehealth services. Access to telehealth services is 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 can 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 can increase productivity, reduces cost, and may promote sustainable practices.
- **Social connectivity**: Internet access can help rural inhabitants stay 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.

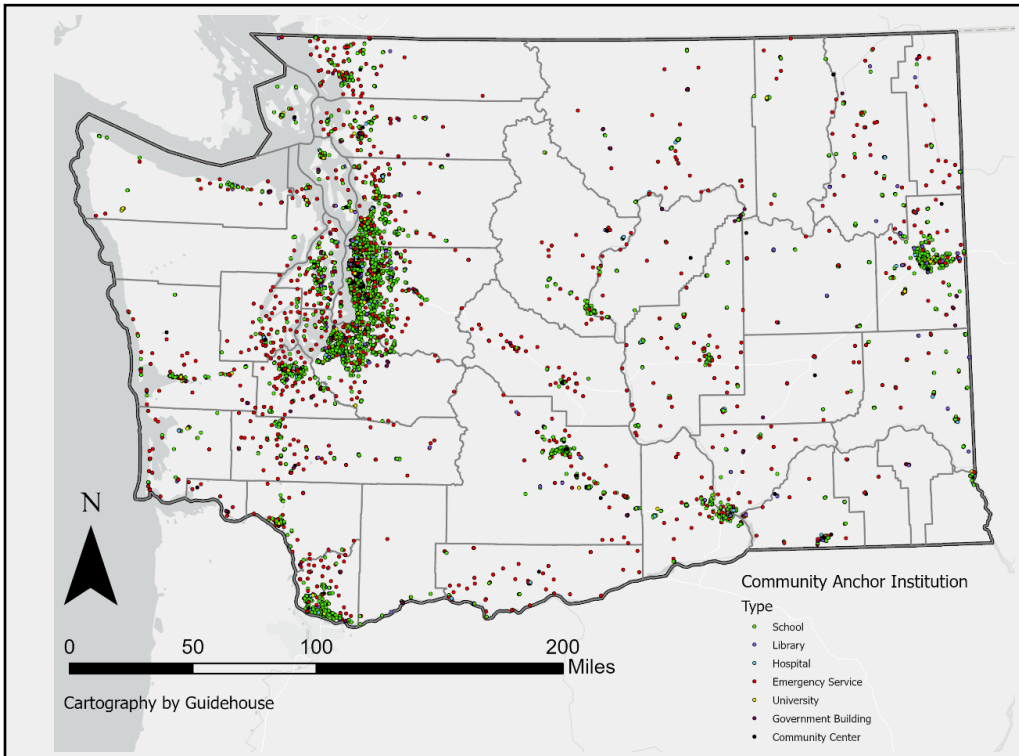
Considering the needs of areas outside of city limits when planning and administering broadband expansion projects is crucial for the well-being and progress of rural inhabitants. By bridging the digital divide, fostering economic development, improving education and healthcare, encouraging agricultural innovation, and enhancing social connectivity, the state, counties, and municipalities can support inclusion of rural areas 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. As rural areas are sparsely populated and have stretches of uninhabited land, it is difficult to ensure easily reachable 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 bookmobile hotspots, a large vehicle providing mobile library and free hotspot connectivity sponsored by the libraries. 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

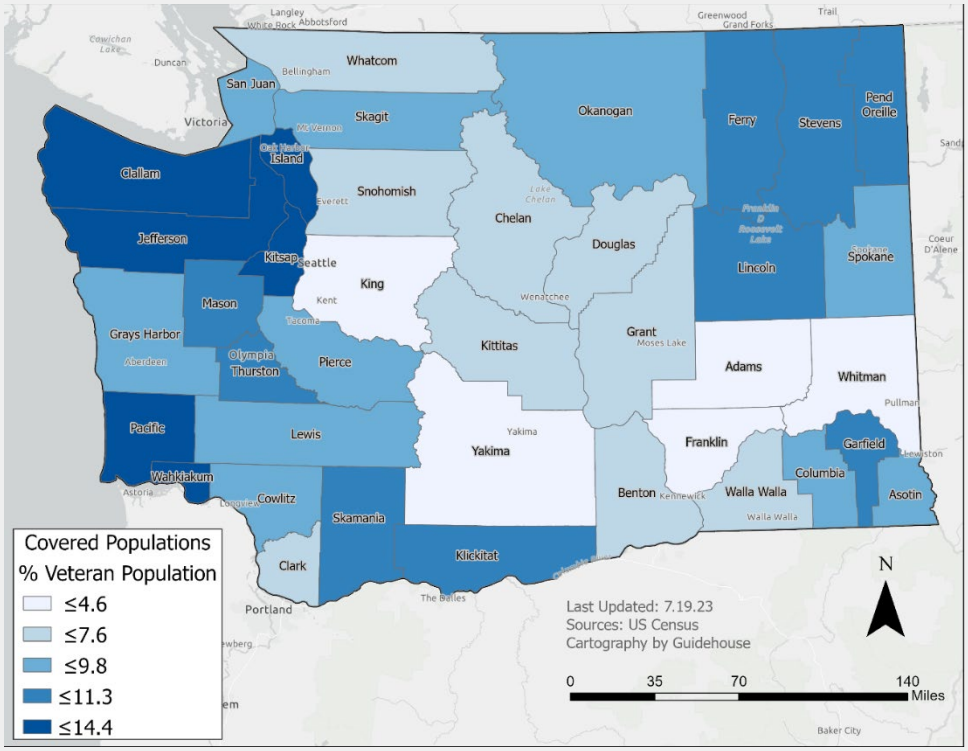
Source: *BEAD Five-Year Action Plan*

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 such as 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 exacerbates 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, North Central Washington, Whatcom County, Snohomish and Island County, as well as Spokane County.[273] These successful programs can be expanded to serve rural areas of Washington consistently and sustainably.

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

3.2.2.8 Veterans

As of September 30, 2023, there are approximately 525,000 veterans in Washington, according to data from the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans are mostly concentrated in western Washington as displayed in **Map 18** and **Table 32**. Many veterans have overlapping identities with other covered populations, such as 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 32: Top Five Counties with Highest Percentage of Veterans[274]

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

[274] Data from 2020 U.S. Census.

CURRENTLY AVAILABLE BASELINE DATA[275]

Broadband subscription rates	Device ownership rates
• 78% of veterans that have been on active duty in the past, but are not now, have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide.	• 85% of veterans that have been on active duty in the past, but are not now, own a laptop or computer, compared to 87% statewide.

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. As a whole, veterans have an unemployment rate of 2.7%. However, young veterans, ages 18–24, have a higher-than-average unemployment rate of 6.5%.[276] Studies show that recently separated veterans struggle with unemployment due to proximity to their service. This infers that they are having difficulties adjusting to the civilian workforce. It is essential to provide recently separated veterans with the resources and digital skills necessary to support their integration into civilian work.

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. However, some veterans struggle with the complicated system, preferring in-person methods for accessing benefits through agencies like the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

> "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 WDVA were able to provide 4,000 participants with a laptop, smart phone, or hotspot, as well as some training to use the devices to ensure veterans have the tools and support they need to access systems through mid-2023. Unfortunately, the need for services exceeded funding available, and WDVA is seeking funding opportunities to reinstate and expand the program. Expanding programs such as digital navigators and other community-based programming can help veterans navigate complicated government systems to receive the benefits they have earned and need.

[275] U.S. Census Bureau (2022), ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded.

[276] 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

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 prospects. These children are in the temporary custody of the state, specifically the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).

There are approximately 10,060 children in foster care in Washington as of July 2023; over 2,100 of these children are waiting for adoptive families, as shared by a DCYF program manager during a key informant interview.[277] 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.[278] There is also a shortage of licensed group homes and foster homes, resulting in overcrowded group care and frequent placement changes.[279] State agencies are therefore increasing the practice of housing children and youth in hotel rooms.[280] Washington state recorded over 4,000 hotel stays in 2022 for children and youth under the age of 18.[281] There has been a 468% increase in hotel stays for youth in foster care since 2017, as recorded by the Washington State Office of the Family and Children's Ombud.[282] The instability of these environments can disrupt educational continuity, exacerbate emotional trauma, and hinder the development of meaningful relationships 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 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 such as computers (if funding is available) that would help children become more independent. 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 informative interviews with program managers at DCYF.

[277] This figure shifts from month to month and the WSBO will work with DCYF to track data related to youth in foster care as this information is not publicly available.
[278] US Department of Education, Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Foster Care. Accessed at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795825.pdf
[279] 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
[280] 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
[281] Ibid.
[282] 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 SAFELY

Foster care management services, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were required to meet youth in foster care in-person 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 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 of youth in foster care, 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 local business 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 access online schooling resources and online enrollment applications, as well as for social connectivity.[283] 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 technology 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. Using plain talk and youth friendly language when creating guidance and resource tools for youth in foster care can help keep them engaged with their care management services. Providing information in different platforms such as videos or through social media may also be more effective than print resources.[284]

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 Computers 4 Kids (C4K) program administered by OSPI and the Computers for Learning program administered by the U.S. General Services Administration. The C4K program makes it possible to request and to donate state-owned, surplus computers and computer-related equipment to any public school district or

[283] Interview with program manager at DCYF on July 7, 2023

[284] 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

educational service district in Washington state. By law, only public-school districts in Washington state are eligible for equipment sourced through C4K. Computers for Learning is a federally-administered program that provides schools and educational programs across the country with computer equipment for classroom learning. The Computers for Learning program allows eligible organizations to view and select the computer equipment that federal agencies have reported as surplus, which then is 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 individuals have found it difficult to acquire a device through lending programs, since many device lending programs are administered through schools, and they may be unaware of other device lending programs. 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. The required training courses include a Caregiver Core training course, a First Aid/CPR training course, and a Bloodborne 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.[285]

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

According to the July 2023 Washington State Snapshot of Homeless in Washington report there were just over 202,000 individuals who were unstably housed or homeless based on combined data sources from Medicaid, Economic Service, and the Homeless Management Information System.[286] 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, Washington state's population experiencing housing

[285] Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (n.d.), Caregiver Training and Alliance CaRES. Accessed at: Caregiver Training and Alliance CaRES | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families

[286] Washington State Department of Commerce (2023), Snapshot of Homelessness Report. Accessed at: Snapshot_July_2023.pdf | Powered by Box

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.[287] However, there are likely many more people and intersecting communities experiencing housing instability as the population is severely undercounted.[288] 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, these numbers can fluctuate significantly from year-to-year.

NEED FOR MORE PUBLIC WI-FI LOCATIONS

Many of the covered populations that were engaged for the creation of this Digital Equity Plan spoke to their reliance on cell phones as their primary device for connecting to the internet. Programs such as 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 such as coffee shops or grocery stores may close in the evening and not have a strong enough signal for people to access from outside. 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 populations 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 public Wi-Fi locations need to be made available all hours to meet a critical need for services that meet populations in need where they are.

[287] 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

[288] 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*

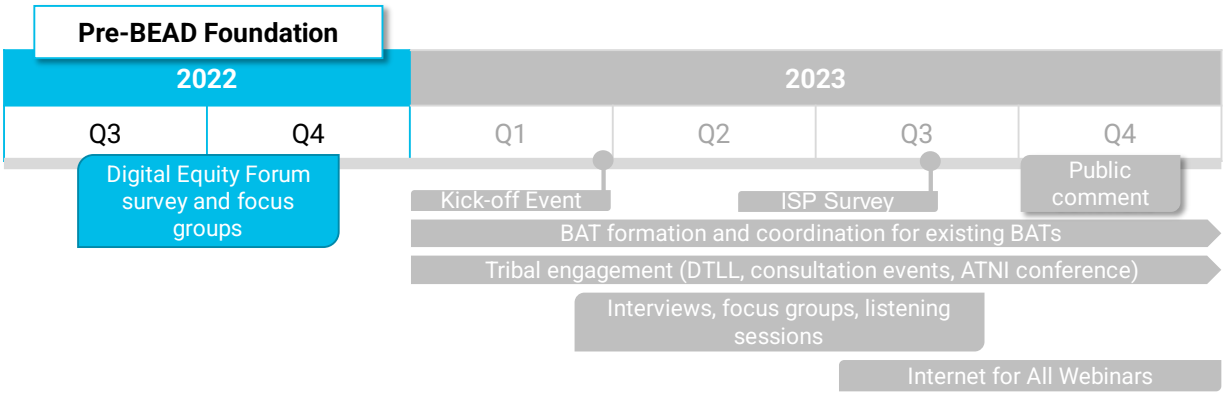
The vision of the state's Digital Equity Plan can only be accomplished by centering the voices of individuals from covered populations and working with communities to eliminate barriers to connection. The state's commitment to ongoing partnerships and stakeholder engagement is critical for creating a strong foundation to successfully provide affordable broadband and the skills to use it. The state of Washington has connected with over 4,000 individuals from July 2022 through January 2024 through public engagement activities. These activities combined conversations related to the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and Digital Equity programs, with their feedback contributing to the development of this Digital Equity Plan. However, the state recognizes that more outreach is required to support overarching goals and that community needs evolve over time. Plans to continue community outreach and engagement as an ongoing effort are described in **Section 4.1.3**.

The WSBO is deeply invested in conducting meaningful engagement with community members and organizations to aim 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 Washington State Broadband Office (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 in decision-making and governance, with particular attention paid to geographic coverage across the state.
2. Promote an open, inclusive, and transparent public involvement process.
3. Strengthen partnerships with active digital equity champions and entities serving covered populations by offering diverse engagement opportunities.
4. Provide concise information through multiple communication channels regarding how the public can engage with this work to reduce confusion.

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

Figure 5: 2022 Stakeholder Engagement and Tribal Partnership Timeline[289]



In anticipation of the BEAD and Digital Equity planning processes, and prior to the period of performance for National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) planning funds, the WSBO convened the state's Digital Equity Forum to identify challenges to digital equity in the state, as **Figure 5** shows. This action was taken in partnership with the Washington State Office of Equity. The forum conducted activities using state funds identified in the fiscal year (FY) 22 supplemental budget. These activities 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.[290]
- **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 needed:** Faster and more reliable service needs to be available to more people at more affordable rates and from more providers.

[289] Note: "DTLL" refers to the Dear Tribal Leader Letter

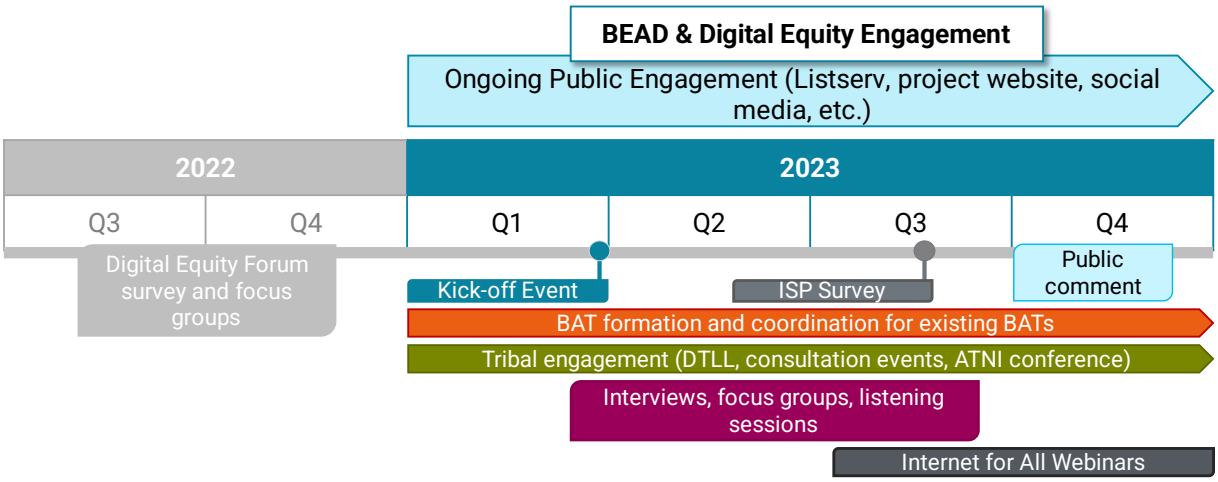
[290] Washington State Department of Commerce (April 4, 2022), Digital Equity Forum Report. Accessed at: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=CommerceReports_2022_LGD_Digital%20Equity%20Forum_Final_4.4.23_66571f42-74cb-40e6-994f-e1e81fe78e89.pdf. Survey and focus group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

- **Expanded access and digital skills are required:** 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.
- **Higher quality equipment is needed:** Varied quality of internet access equipment (such as modems, Wi-Fi routers, etc.) negatively affects broadband access, and individuals need access to quality equipment to fully benefit from broadband-level speeds.
- **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 serve underserved communities more effectively.[291]

Findings from these efforts provided 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.

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

Figure 6: 2023 Public Engagement Timeline



As depicted in **Figure 6**, the WSBO is building from prior efforts to support ongoing public engagement by demonstrating its commitment to learn from previous engagement efforts and to continue hearing from all Washingtonians. Importantly, the WSBO used state funds to support the development of Broadband Action Teams (BATs). The WSBO partnered with Washington State University-Extension to support existing BATs and stand-up new teams. In total, 51 BATs across all 39 counties and 12 of 29 federally recognized tribes submitted Community Action Plans (CAPs). These CAPs informed the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and this Digital Equity Plan. In addition to the 12 tribes that submitted independent CAPs, four tribes partnered with counties in developing a CAP. BATs consist of a variety of partners including local and tribal government

[291] 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

representatives, economic development councils, community anchor institutions (CAIs), and more.

Additionally, the WSBO and its partners, including the Equity in Education Coalition and the City of Seattle, conducted over 90 engagement activities throughout the state between July 2022 and January 2024, which have helped inform this Digital Equity Plan as **Table 33** shows.

Table 33: Public Engagement Activities

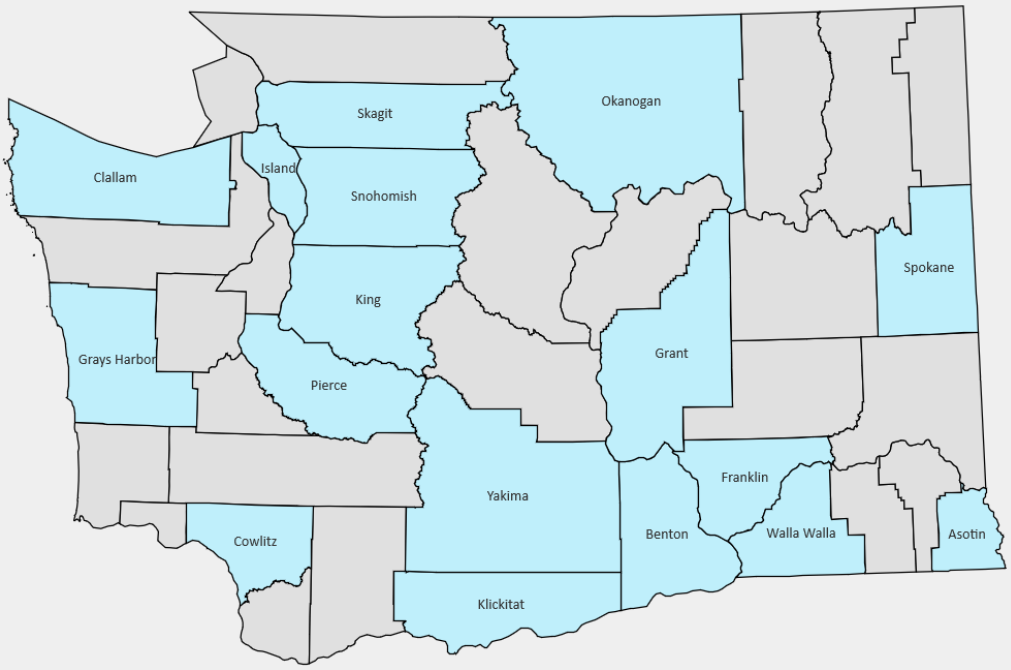
(July 2022 through January 2024)

Engagement Type (# of events)	Number of People Engaged	Covered Populations / Organizations Representing Covered Populations[292]
Interviews (32)	56	All
Focus Groups (33)	262	All
Community Events (mobile engagement) (5)	157	All except incarcerated individuals
Listening Sessions (12)	267	All
Public Comment Open Houses (3)	31	All
Internet for All Webinars (8)	1161	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	4,679	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 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Map 19 shows counties where in-person engagement events were conducted between May to October 2023. In-person engagement events were held in 17 of 39 counties. Due to time and resource limitations that prevented WSBO staff from visiting every county, the WSBO selected locations to cover each region of the state (western, central, and eastern), areas where both venues and partners could be identified, and venues that were accessible by public transit when possible.

[292] "Covered Populations" describes the eight (8) population groups NTIA identified in the Digital Equity Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). 1) Individuals who live in covered households (income <150% of 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, 8) Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. Washington state also recognizes two additional populations under its ESSHB1723 State Digital Equity Act: 1) Individuals experiencing housing instability and 2) Children and youth in foster care.



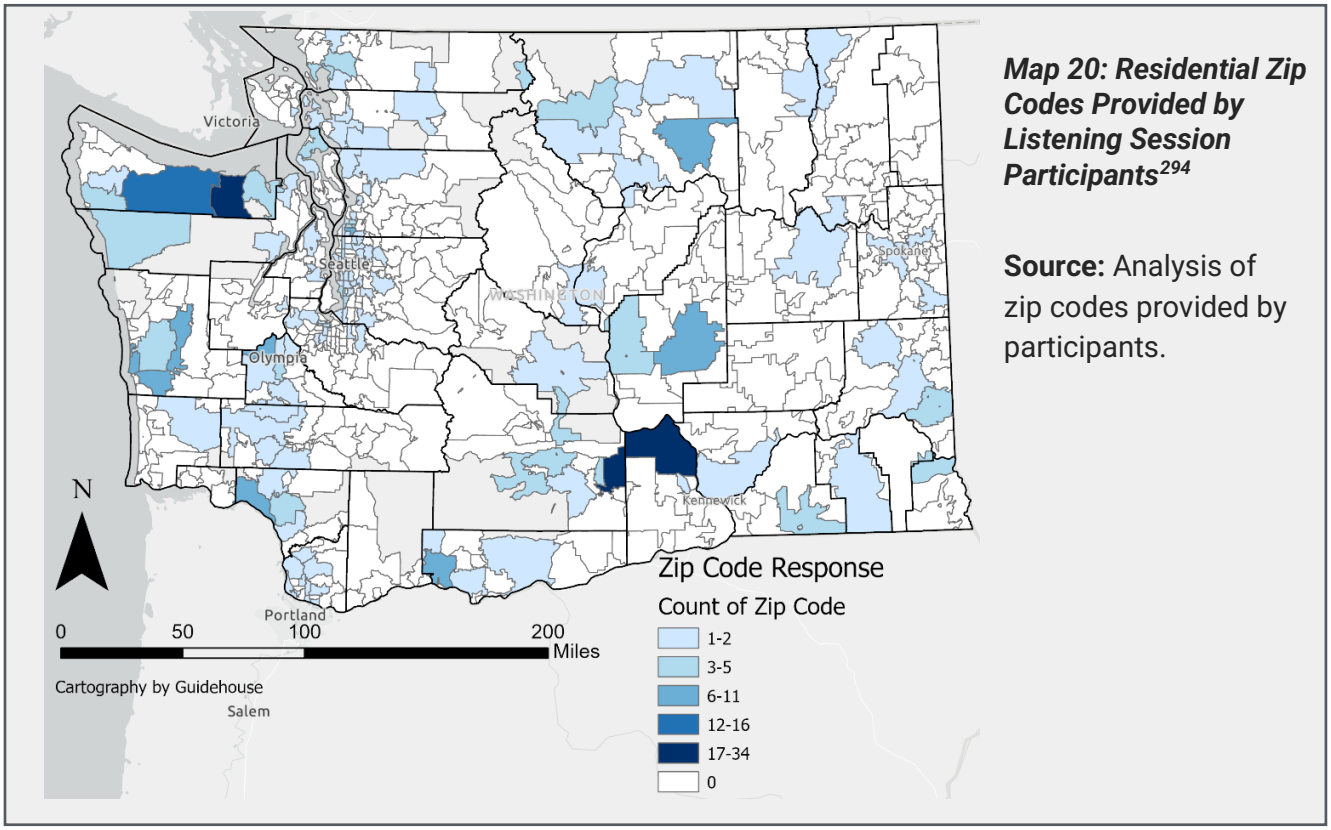
Map 19: Locations of In-Person Engagement Events (May – October 2023)

Source: List of public engagement activities (Appendix 7.6)

The public engagement process has allowed Washingtonians across the state to engage 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 BEAD and this 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, and phone calls. For example, for one listening session hosted by Sunnyside School District, 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 recommended best practice. Gift cards provided through state funding 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.[293]

Such strategies appear to have produced a positive effect on engagement participation. 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 **Appendix 7.6**.

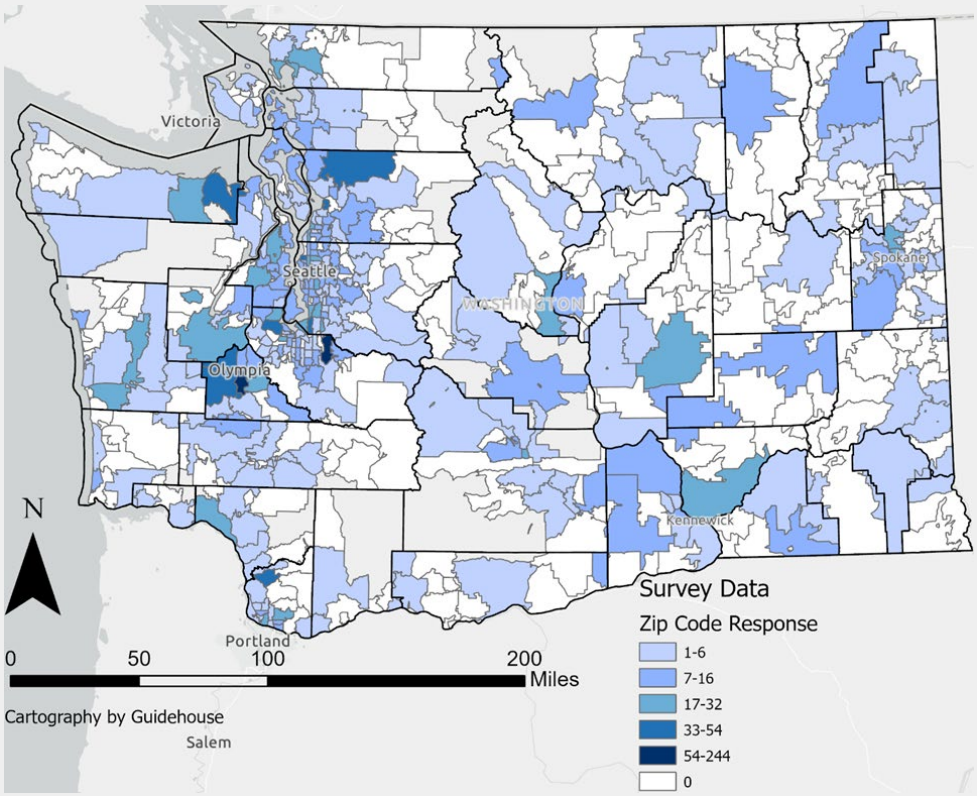
[293] Washington State Office of Equity (n.d.), Community Compensation Guidelines. Accessed at: https://equity.wa.gov/people/community-compensation-guidelines



Map 20: Residential Zip Codes Provided by Listening Session Participants[294]

Source: Analysis of zip codes provided by participants.

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



Map 21: Location of Survey Respondents by Zip Code

Source: Analysis of zip codes provided by respondents

One important lesson that the WSBO intends to integrate into ongoing and future engagement activities is the value of attending existing community events. 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 that were already planned as compared to planning an event specific to this planning process. Examples of community events and services included local festivals, career fairs, public transit centers, senior center lunches, and food banks.

Example engagement event

The engagement team visited the food bank in Port Angeles and was 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 is still a need for targeted listening sessions and focus groups to reach specific covered populations in more regions of the state, 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 essential for those who may rely on word of mouth or nondigital forms of outreach, including those who lack broadband altogether. Accordingly, the WSBO and the DEU will continue to engage and coordinate with community-based organizations and CAIs as it arranges additional engagement activities during the BEAD and Digital Equity implementation phase.

The WSBO supplemented the digital public comment opportunities with three in-person outreach events to engage with communities during the public comment period for the Digital Equity Plan, which occurred in September 2023. At these events, community members had 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. The WSBO also intentionally extended the public comment period from the minimum 30-day requirement to 60 days to allow more individuals and organizations time to provide input. Additionally, the WSBO has been holding monthly webinars to discuss progress and BEAD- and Digital Equity-related topics and to answer questions.

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, CAIs, and various organizations to directly conduct the engagement work. For example, the City of Seattle conducted 10 focus groups funded by the WSBO 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 identify with 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.[295]

Altogether, the WSBO intends to implement an ongoing engagement strategy involving five related activities, as **Figure 7** describes.

Figure 7: Ongoing Engagement Strategy

1. ***Identify Partners and Stakeholders.*** To capture full public engagement from distinct covered populations and stakeholders, it is helpful to focus on a specific population with a related outreach method.
2. ***Determine Method of Outreach.*** Consider a variety of data gathering measures, as underserved communities are often 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 forums for larger discussion.
4. ***Establish and Allocate Necessary Resources.*** Resources may include funding, staff, time, or content creation.
5. ***Incorporate Feedback into Digital Equity Work.*** Iterative understanding and incorporation of partner and stakeholder feedback can act as a benchmark for success in meeting community needs.

[295] City of Seattle Information Technology Department (2023). *Technology Access and Adoption Study: Qualitative Research Report*. Accessed at: https://seattle.gov/techaccessstudy

Please note that there will not be one singular outreach method for one covered population. The WSBO will consider the intersectionality and diverse needs within each covered population to support holistic engagement.

4.1.2 Identification of Stakeholders and Partners

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 are important 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 34** contains a preliminary stakeholder and partner list by type with over 200 organizations. The full list of tribal governments and stakeholder organization names and the covered populations they serve is in **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 tribal governments and stakeholders through engagement activities.

Table 34: Summary of the Number and Type of Partners and Stakeholder Organizations as of December 2023

Stakeholder / Partner Type	Count by Stakeholder Type
Civil Rights Organization	2
Community Anchor Institution	15
County or Municipal Government	28
Economic Development	3
Health or Telehealth Organization (Direct Service and Policy focus)	3
Hispanic-serving Institution	1
Indian Tribe, Alaska Native Entity, or Native Hawaiian Organization	3
Industry Representative or Association (501c6)	7
Institutions of Higher Education (if not listed above)	6
Internet Service Provider	32
Labor Organization or Union	1
Local Education Agency	7
Nonprofit Organization (501c3)	15
Organization that Represents Covered Populations	9
Other	25
Port	6

Stakeholder / Partner Type	Count by Stakeholder Type
Predominantly Black Institution	1
Public Housing Authority	2
Public Utility	11
State Agency	24
Tribal Government	20
Workforce Development Organization	15
TOTAL	**236**

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

The most appropriate outreach and engagement methods will depend on the intended audience and results. Below, **Table 35** and **Table 36** outline outreach methods the WSBO is currently using to engage with the public 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 the selected method will need to be tailored for potential partners, message and intended results, resources needed, platform or format, and outreach coordinator for each engagement effort. To support 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 hired a Policy and Communications 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 and Digital Equity Program-related activities commence.

As described in **Table 35**, digital navigators can help with targeted outreach in unserved and underserved areas and can provide opportunity for two-way engagement methods for sharing and receiving information about community connectivity and digital inclusion needs. The second cohort began at the end of 2023.[296] 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 provide input on the Digital Equity Plan, which will also include strategies for outreach to communities of interest and covered populations. The WSBO established review teams to review this Digital Equity Plan, the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and both volumes of the Initial Proposal. 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

[296] 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/

engagement. Additionally, as facilitators of recently submitted CAPs, 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, liaise, and engage with BATs regularly. The WSBO, in partnership with the DEU, will also continue to consult steering group members as part of the implementation process for the Digital Equity Plan, which includes, amongst others, representatives from the Office of Equity, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, and the Washington State Department of Transportation. The WSBO has solicited input from other state agencies who may have data related to key performance indicators (KPIs) and could be potential implementation partners for activities as part of BEAD and Digital Equity Programs.

Table 35: 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 • Department of Veterans Affairs • Department of Social and Health Services
	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 • 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, local workforce development boards, 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	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
	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 to create new and updated materials depending on the outreach and engagement activity. 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 one-off basis; for example, newsletters may be sent on a monthly cadence, whereas specific engagement events such as TVW broadcasting may occur ad hoc as part of a promotional campaign to build awareness around a specific program like the ACP. **Table 36** 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 Policy and Communications 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. The WSBO will determine if supplemental staff resources may need to be contracted or where it is possible to leverage existing communications support from Commerce and other state agencies who may work with various populations. For example, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) would be an ideal partner for outreach related to youth in foster care.

Table 36: 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 • Washington State Board of Technical and Community Colleges (SBCTC) • Association of Washington Cities • Chambers of Commerce • Education and workforce development organizations • CAIs • 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 CAIs.
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	• Low-income households • 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	• Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) • 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 DOC, Reentry Council staff, program providers.
	Platform or Format	• Virtual engagement
Digital equity dashboard (*to be released*)	Population	• General and covered populations
	Potential Partners	• Other state agencies who may have relevant data to share
	Message & Intended Results	• Provide open data for the public pulled from a variety of sources for data layers related to Affordable Connectivity

Outreach Method	Category	Description
		Program, covered population statistics, digital equity related indices • Viewers can use the online story maps to layer data or download data files for their own analyses
	Resources Needed	• Technical resource to update dashboard and iteratively build • Software platform (ArcGIS)
	Platform or Format	• Accessible website

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 and public comments, 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** for lists of engagement activities 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 outreach 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 informal 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 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
- One-on-one conversations between subject matter experts
- Monthly office hours hosted by the WSBO team

On March 23, 2023, the WSBO sent an official "Dear Tribal Leader Letter" to chairpersons of all 29 federally recognized tribes across the state of Washington. In the letter WSBO identified funding opportunities with the BEAD and Digital Equity programs and extended an invitation to tribal leaders to engage in consultation. In addition to the Dear Tribal Leader Letter, the WSBO utilized a variety of methods of outreach to maintain open lines of communication with tribal partners. The WSBO partners with the Commerce's Office of Tribal Relations to identify key points of contact within each tribe. Once these points of contact were established, the WSBO worked to provide regular updates regarding opportunities for engagement and consultation.

The WSBO also hosted opportunities for consultation at both the Spring and Fall of 2023 conferences for the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI), and at the Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council in October of 2023, and attended the Federal Communications Commission Tribal Workshop hosted by the Lummi Nation as well as the 34th Annual Centennial Accord Meeting hosted by the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs. The WSBO partnered with the

Spokane Tribe of Indians and the Nisqually Indian Tribe to host regional consultation events in August of 2023.

Informal opportunities for engagement have included three virtual listening sessions, which all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington were invited to attend, as well as monthly tribal broadband office hours. These tribal broadband office hours began in August and directly resulted from a suggestion made during the Spokane regional consultation event. Finally, the Commerce Tribal Advisory Committee has announced an intention to convene a subcommittee of representatives from Washington tribes to provide feedback to the WSBO on broadband and digital equity matters. The WSBO will continue to seek opportunities for engagement and consultation with tribal partners throughout this process.

The following bullets list formal tribal consultation and engagement activities in 2023. Please note that formal tribal consultation events are bolded and italicized; as of December 2023, the WSBO has engaged in formal tribal consultations with 16 tribes.

- 3/23/2023: (Email) Dear Tribal Leader Letter sent to the chairpersons of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state announcing the BEAD and Digital Equity grant programs.
- 3/27/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with a representative from Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe to discuss tribal broadband and BEAD.
- 3/28/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with a representative from the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe to discuss tribal broadband and BEAD.
- ***5/3/2023: (Virtual Consultation) The WSBO met with representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity on the Colville Reservation.***
- 5/6/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent a follow up letter to the chairpersons of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to announce WSBO's attendance at ATNI and to invite tribal consultation or engagement on the topics of BEAD and Digital Equity.
- 5/10/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives from the Spokane Tribe of Indians to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.
- 5/11/2023: (Informal In-Person Meeting) The WSBO hosted an information session to discuss tribal broadband, BEAD and Digital Equity, and preferred tribal consultation methods with representatives of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Makah Tribe, and Samish Indian Nation.
- 5/15/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives of the Suquamish Tribe of Indians to discuss broadband challenges on the Suquamish Reservation.
- 5/22/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with a representative of the Makah Tribe to discuss ongoing challenges to accessing broadband on the reservation.

- 5/23/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives of the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe to discuss broadband connectivity on the reservation.
- 6/14/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent a letter to the chairpersons and relevant subject matter experts of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to outline the WSBO's tribal engagement plan and to solicit feedback.
- 6/26/2023: (Virtual Listening Session) The WSBO met with representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, Nisqually Indian Tribe, Quinault Indian Nation, Swinomish Indian Tribe, and Tulalip Tribes to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.
- 6/28/2023: (Virtual Listening Session) The WSBO met with representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, Lummi Nation, Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.
- 6/29/2023: (Virtual Listening Session) The WSBO met with representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Hoh Indian Tribe, and Lummi Nation to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.
- 7/24/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent a Dear Tribal Leader Letter to the chairpersons of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to announce two regional consultation events.
- ***8/8/2023: (In-Person Consultation) The WSBO met with representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and Spokane Tribe of Indians to share information on the BEAD and Digital Equity timelines.***
- ***8/15/2023: (In-Person Consultation) The WSBO met with representatives of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Lummi Nation, Makah Tribe, Nisqually Indian Tribe, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Quinault Indian Nation, Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, Swinomish Indian Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation to share information on the BEAD and Digital Equity timelines.***
- 8/24/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent a follow-up email to representatives of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to thank those who were able to attend the regional consultation events and to announce the public comment period for the Initial Proposal Volume I.
- 8/31/2024: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and Lummi Nation to share information on the BEAD and Digital Equity timelines.
- 9/11/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent an email to tribal broadband contacts of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to announce the WSBO's attendance at ATNI and to invite tribes to engage in consultation.

- ***9/12/2023: (Virtual Consultation) The WSBO met with representatives of the Hoh Indian Tribe to review the BEAD timeline and requirements.***
- 9/15/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent an email to tribal broadband contacts of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to remind them of the WSBO's attendance at ATNI and to reiterate an invitation to engage in consultation.
- ***9/18/2023: (In-Person Consultation) The WSBO met with representatives of the Hoh Indian Tribe, Makah Tribe, and Quileute Tribe at ATNI to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.***
- ***9/19/2023: (In-Person Consultation) The WSBO met with representatives of the Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe at ATNI to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.***
- ***9/19/2023: (In-Person Consultation) The WSBO met with representatives of the Quinault Indian Nation at ATNI to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.***
- 9/19/2023: (Informal In-Person Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives of the Samish Indian Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Makah Tribe, Cowlitz Indian Nation, and a representative from Tribal Ready at ATNI to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.
- ***9/20/2023: (In-Person Consultation): The WSBO met with representatives of the Lummi Nation, Nisqually Indian Tribe, and Samish Indian Nation at ATNI to discuss BEAD and Digital Equity.***
- 9/28/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Hoh Indian Tribe, Quileute Tribe, Samish Indian Nation, and Spokane Tribe of Indians to discuss BEAD funding opportunities and the Challenge Process. The tribal representatives recommended that a WSBO representative speak on BEAD and Digital Equity at the 2023 Centennial Accord.
- 10/16/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent an email to tribal broadband contacts of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to announce upcoming engagement opportunities.
- 10/28/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Hoh Indian Tribe, Samish Indian Nation, and Spokane Tribe of Indians to receive feedback regarding tribal consultation efforts to date and hear concerns regarding pole attachments.
- 10/30/2023: (Informal In-Person Meeting) The WSBO presented updates to representatives of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state regarding BEAD and Digital Equity in-person at the 2023 Centennial Accord. A separate working group also took place to discuss pole attachments.
- 11/14/2023: (Email) The WSBO sent a November newsletter to representatives of all 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington state to solicit the feedback of tribes during the Initial Proposal Volume II public comment period and to remind them of the upcoming tribal broadband office hours.

- 11/30/2023: (Informal Virtual Meeting) The WSBO met with representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Lummi Nation, Nisqually Indian Tribe, and Spokane Tribe of Indians during a Tribal Broadband Office Hours meeting.

As sovereign nations with plans and goals for digital equity and broadband infrastructure, collaborating with tribes is critical to expanding digital connectivity across Washington. As the state implements activities to narrow the digital divide, continuous engagement and developing data and information sharing agreements with tribes will be crucial to understanding gaps and successful program implementation.

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. The WSBO is planning to continue running monthly webinars through at least 2024. 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

The strategies outlined in this chapter are designed to address the needs of covered populations identified in **Chapter 3.2** not already addressed by current state, local, or private entities. Overall, the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) and the Digital Equity Unit (DEU) plan to implement strategies that increase digital access, affordability, and adoption among covered populations in partnership with agencies like the Office of Equity, the Digital Equity Forum members, Digital Navigator Program grantees, 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 populations. Coordination between partners will be an important foundation for successful implementation and continuation of the activities described in this chapter. Additionally, this Digital Equity Plan and the anticipated National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) State Digital Equity Capacity Grant funding should be seen as catalysts for digital inclusion activities rather than serving as the "last word" in digital equity in the state.

Washington state's robust network of digital inclusion assets, local and regional digital equity champions, community-based organizations, and state legislation provides the WSBO and the DEU with the opportunity to embed digital equity principles into programs and resources already operating within the state. The overarching mission is to integrate digital equity into existing and new efforts that serve covered populations to reduce disparities and address covered population specific needs identified in this work. These strategies use existing networks and future digital equity resources. The strategies also consider current and future conditions, such as workforce needs, of Washington state to safeguard sustainable outcomes.

Each strategy is designed to address needs identified in **Section 3.2** through measurable objectives and sub-objectives introduced in **Chapter 2**. Below, each of the six strategies are organized with objectives, sub-objectives, and activities. Each measurable objective or sub-objective also includes key performance indicators (KPIs). The WSBO will utilize KPIs to measure progress towards improving digital equity among the covered populations and to identify if there are any gaps that may need to be addressed to "course correct" or supplement existing activities. While not every covered population has a specific sub-objective, available baseline data was reviewed to identify where there were the largest disparities in access to broadband or digital devices to develop targeted sub-objectives and universal objectives that address all residents in Washington. Ongoing outreach and research will be conducted to identify additional baseline data and refine additional KPIs as appropriate. Potential ways to measure success are described in **Section 5.1** and include both quantitative and qualitative information such as Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) enrollment data and survey responses.[297]

The WSBO intends to regularly monitor KPIs and collaborate with partners who work with individuals who identify with a covered population to discover opportunities to iterate on the

[297] Note: The ACP will run out of funding in April 2024 if the program is not renewed by Congress.

strategies, evaluating and updating them as needed. Some KPIs will be updated quarterly, whereas other KPIs will be updated more infrequently depending on the data source.

5.1 Implementation Strategy & Key Activities

5.1.1 Strategy 1: Expand Broadband Availability and Increase Affordability

Expanding broadband availability across Washington state is the first step to bridge 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.

5.1.1.1 Activity 1.1: Coordinate with Washington state's Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program to align 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 to build awareness of low-cost service options and internet benefit programs. • Convene internet service providers (ISPs), state agencies, and local partners to encourage digital equity coalition building to advance both BEAD and Digital Equity Program goals. These coalitions should prioritize working with partners who can connect with covered populations with some of the widest disparities in access. • Embed equity into workforce planning efforts related to BEAD deployment project. • Work with partners in local and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations to spread awareness of the BEAD Challenge Process.
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, such as 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 and achieving universal access within Washington state. To update the list of unserved and underserved locations in the state, the WSBO will be administering a "Challenge Process" that allows challenges from nonprofit organizations, units of local and tribal governments, and broadband service providers to submit service challenges on whether a location should be designated as underserved (speeds below 100 megabits per second (Mbps] download / 20 Mbps upload) or unserved (speeds below 25 Mbps download / 3 Mbps upload), and therefore eligible for BEAD funding. Residents can submit challenges through their unit of local or tribal government or a nonprofit. Encouraging residents who are unserved or underserved to submit challenges to their respective units of local or tribal governments or nonprofits will increase the accuracy of broadband availability data and help

KEY COMPONENTS
increase availability of reliable high-speed internet by including unserved and underserved locations in BEAD-funded project areas.[298]

5.1.1.2 Activity 1.2: Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in low-cost and subsidized broadband service for low-income communities.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Work with digital navigators, local and tribal governments, coalitions such as the Broadband Action teams (BATs), and organizations described in the Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory (**Appendix 7.2**) to expand outreach and enrollment support for covered populations into programs that subsidize or provide low-cost 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 ACP and the Lifeline Program.
- Encourage and work with ISPs to support the development of low-income service plans that can reduce affordability barriers for low-income residents as outlined in the BEAD Initial Proposal Volume II.

Description

Tailoring statewide outreach and engagement campaigns for covered populations will improve general awareness of the resources available and help identify gaps in digital inclusion 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 may include pamphlets and other advertising media distributed across libraries, health clinics, education institutions, and other high foot-trafficked community buildings; advertisements for newspapers, radios, billboards, and television channels; a culturally sensitive, social media campaign supported by communication teams at state agencies; and/or related in-person events.

5.1.1.3 Activity 1.3: Utilize Washington state's Digital Equity Dashboard to track progress in broadband services for covered populations.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Coordinate with state agencies to identify data and feasibility of including in Digital Equity Dashboard.
- Update the 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. Facilitate accessibility updates to the Dashboard to support use by individuals with disabilities.[299]
- Utilize the dashboard to help share progress towards digital equity goals and to provide open data in a centralized location for the public.

[298] The Challenge Process is outlined in detail in the BEAD Initial Proposal Volume I document: https://deptofcommerce.box.com/s/gaq0q6j5myr4ebnxjj9wvcp1ac3ppqfk

[299] Note: The Digital Equity Dashboard is currently undergoing usability testing to support user-friendly access for all Washingtonians before the dashboard goes live.

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 supplement annual progress reports as clearly defined access and affordability metrics alongside geographic data become available during the implementation of the BEAD and Digital Equity Act Programs on covered populations across the state of Washington. This can be used to track progress, and to inform long-term decision making for equitable broadband deployment and investment. Note that specific metrics to be tracked on the Digital Equity Dashboard still need to be determined based on technical feasibility and data availability.

5.1.1.4 Activity 1.4: Support Washington community anchor institutions (CAIs) to improve and increase the number of free public Wi-Fi locations.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Work with CAIs to update Washington's Drive-in Wi-Fi Hotspots location finder, a 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 CAIs. With more publicly available Wi-Fi locations, there will be increased opportunities for all to get connected, especially those who may be experiencing housing instability or rely on public Wi-Fi as their main source of internet access.

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, U.S Census data on internet subscription rates in Washington state, and state agencies. • 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 hard-to-reach covered populations, for example, due to geographic remoteness or language barriers.
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 (CAPs) developed by tribal and county BATs serve as a valuable starting point. However, communities may identify with multiple covered populations and experience compounding complex barriers based on overlapping identities that exacerbate digital inequalities.[300] Ongoing engagement is required to dig deeper into some of the nuances across and within covered populations, which can be supported by existing digital inclusion tools. For example, the "Digital Equity Census" developed by the Library of Stevens County ascertains the root causes of not being connected to the internet, for example, due to price, availability, fear, or unawareness of value, which will help digital navigators with regionally and tribally based cultural competencies to address the specific need. Additionally, the "Digital Equity Needs Survey for Educators" conducted by the Washington State Board of Technical and Community Colleges (SBCTC) assesses digital inclusion needs in communities served by educators in community and technical colleges providing adult education and workforce development training.

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 to accelerate and increase impact.

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 overall percentage of households with internet subscriptions and covered populations according to the U.S. Census and the percentage of eligible households enrolled in the ACP or any successor program. By actively engaging in activities described under Strategy 1, Washington can make significant strides in improving broadband availability and affordability, supporting outcomes described in Section 2.2 related to economic growth and workforce development, education, health, civic and social engagement, and delivery of other essential services.[301]

Project Spotlight:

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

[300] 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/

[301] Note: The WDVA Digital Navigation Program was not funded in the current cohort of Digital Navigators, but WDVA is continuing to seek funding to continue the program. WDVA is collaborating with Equity in Education Coalition and other Digital Navigator consortium members to pursue opportunities to further this work, demonstrating the strength of partnerships developed.

Goal 1: Eliminate Barriers				
Strategy 1	Expand broadband availability and increase affordability.			
Universal objective 1	All Washingtonians to have the opportunity to access and afford broadband service.			
Sub-objectives				
1.1 Aging Individuals	**1.2 Individuals with Disabilities**	**1.3 Low-income Households**	**1.4 Racial/Ethnic Minorities**	**1.5 Rural Inhabitants**
Increase the percentage of aging individuals (60+ years) living on a fixed income who have broadband service	Increase the percentage of individuals with a disability able to access reliable and affordable internet to power their assistive technology	Increase access to low-cost internet plans that are reliable and sustainably available to low-income households	Increase broadband service access for American Indian and Alaskan Native individuals	Reduce the percentage of unserved/ underserved locations in rural areas
Baseline Data[302]				
74% of individuals 60+ years have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide	71% of individuals with a disability have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide	29% of eligible households enrolled in ACP (*Note: may need to update if ACP is discontinued*)	70% have broadband internet service compared to 82% statewide—the lowest of any racial/ethnic minority	92% of all unserved/ underserved locations in Washington are in rural areas[303]
Key Performance Indicators				
Percentage of aging individuals with access to broadband	Percentage of individuals with a disability with access to broadband	Percentage of eligible households enrolled in ACP or successor program	Percentage of American Indian and Alaskan Native individuals with access to broadband	Percentage of unserved/ underserved locations in rural areas
Near- and Long-term Targets				
Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Increase by 10% Long-term: Increase by 20%	Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Reduce by 50% Long-term: Reduce by 90%

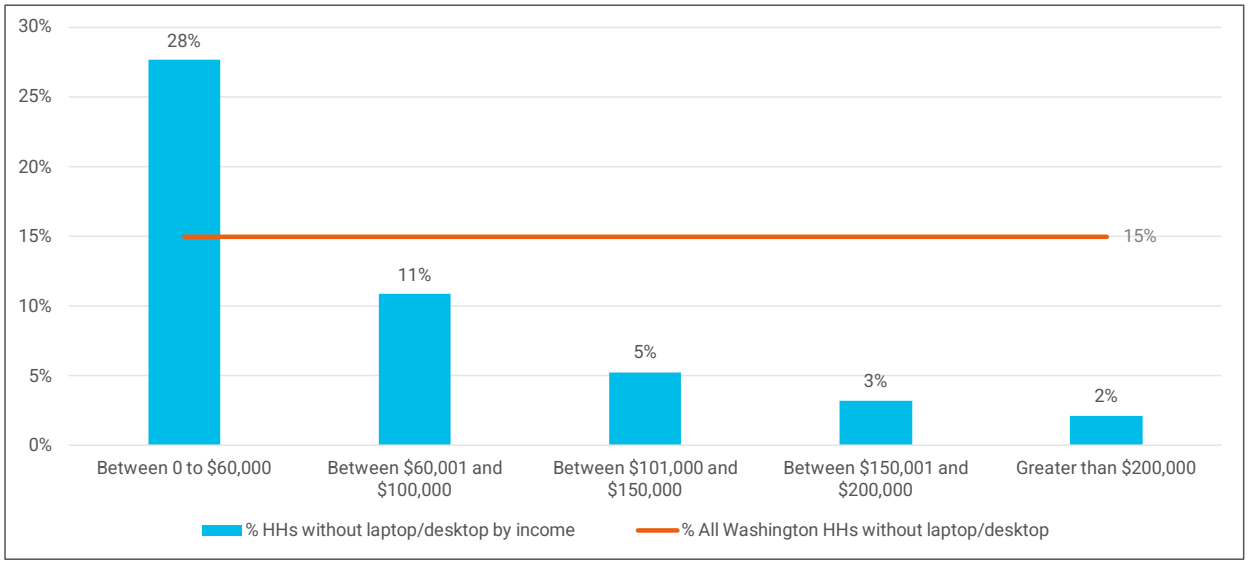
[302] Sources: 1) ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Note: Satellite and cellular internet services were excluded. 2) Institute for Local Self-Reliance Affordable Connectivity Program Dashboard (2023). Accessed at: https://acpdashboard.com/

[303] Underserved location analysis from FCC broadband serviceable location fabric for Washington state as of October 24, 2023.The rural boundaries were sourced from: Office of Financial Management, Census Geographic Files. Accessed at: Census geographic files | Office of Financial Management (wa.gov)

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 8** shows, 28% of households earning $60,000 or less lack access to a laptop or desktop at home, which is nearly double the statewide average of 15%. Barriers such as cost and a lack of available public resources that offer digital device lending programs or computer labs can result in lower digital literacy rates. The state is prioritizing access and affordability of digital devices for Washingtonians.

Figure 8: Percentage of Households in Washington Without Laptop or Desktop by Household Income[304]



The following activities were developed to address the general need for modern technology to access the digital world.

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

5.1.2.1 Activity 2.1: Partner with ISPs, CAIs, and device distributors to develop awareness campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile hotspots, and free, subsidized, or low-cost device programs.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Utilize Digital Inclusion Assets identified in **Section 3.1** to locate hotspot distribution programs.
- Understand utilization of the programs among 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 regionally focused campaigns.
- Expand on pre-existing hotspot and computing device distribution programs.
- Increase distribution locations in areas with in high covered population densities, with a keen awareness towards low-income communities, communities with limited English proficiency.
- Partner with organizations that serve Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders due to their low rates of laptop and computer ownership.

Description

During the digital inclusion asset inventory data collection process, mobile networks and hotspots were often mentioned as a vital source of internet connectivity for Washingtonians across the state. This is particularly true in areas where traveling to CAIs or other buildings with publicly available Wi-Fi is a barrier and home internet access is unavailable. Mobile computer labs offer access to both the internet and devices to areas within their counties that do not have a physical library location. They also provide access for residents who cannot travel.

Library consortiums may also 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. While this can be viewed as a "stop-gap" measure as the state makes headway towards universal access, these types of services will likely still fill an important need into the near future.

Washington state has a wide network of pre-existing resources for device availability and affordability, as illustrated in **Chapter 3**, but more resources are needed to continue and expand upon this work and build awareness. 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—are often not fully aware of the resources available to them for getting online. The WSBO and DEU can work with partners like the Digital Navigator Program grantees to leverage the existing Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory 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, including technical support, and/or support outreach campaigns.

5.1.2.2 Activity 2.2: Develop innovative programs like statewide device repair, refurbishment, reuse, and recycling programs to increase device affordability and availability.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Build upon the lessons learned from previous and existing refurbishment projects (see Section 3.1.3) to explore incentivizing a statewide device-refurbishing program with organizations including, among others, private retailers, repair shops, and government organizations who may currently only recycle or dispose of devices, especially desktop computers, laptops, and monitors.
- Partner with CAIs to expand locations to drop off devices for recycling and repair, and support organizations who perform refurbishment and repair of electronics.
- Partner with schools, colleges, and community organizations to create apprenticeships that can offer local repairs within local communities.
- Begin planning with the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) to consider a digital device refurbishment, and/or reuse programs for justice-involved individuals to give them access to low-cost modern devices upon their reentry to society.
- Begin planning with the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to consider a digital device refurbishment, and/or reuse programs for foster care families to take advantage of when accepted to foster a child, to increase the availability of low-cost digital devices.

Description

By encouraging Washington businesses, government agencies, and individuals to send retired or surplus devices to local businesses and community organizations that refurbish and repair electronic devices to the highest quality standards, the availability of high-quality affordable devices increases in the state. There is also the added benefit of potentially reducing the volume of annually generated e-waste. 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, existing community partnerships, and Washington nonprofit organizations, with multiple drop-off and pick-up locations across Washington to assist with recycling and upcycling used electronic equipment.[305]

[305] The Take it Back Network is a partnership among government agencies, retailers, repair shops, charitable organizations and recyclers that provides consumers with options for recycling certain wastes, including electronics, in a safe and cost-effective manner with multiple locations across King County. More information can be found at: https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/programs/take-it-back.

5.1.2.3 Measuring Success for Device Availability and Affordability

Device availability and affordability will be measured statewide by comparing the baseline of number of households with digital devices, 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 has been collected for covered populations where possible. The WSBO has identified the largest disparities in device ownership for low-income households and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders. Below, sub-objectives have been identified for these specific populations. Sub-objectives are designed to use a focused approach to address the largest disparities identified in the state of Washington.

Goal 1: Eliminate Barriers	
Strategy 2	Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability.
Universal objective 2	All Washingtonians can access and afford the devices needed to maintain digital connectivity.
Sub-objectives	
2.1 Low-income Households	**2.2 Racial/Ethnic Minorities**
Increase the percentage of low-income households that own a laptop or computer	Increase the percentage of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals that own a laptop or computer
Baseline Data	
78% of individuals receiving Medicaid or other governmental assistance own a laptop or desktop compared to 87% statewide *(Proxy data as Medicaid is a means-tested program limited to low-income households)*[306]	73% of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals own a laptop or computer, compared to 87% statewide—the lowest of any racial/ethnic minority
Key Performance Indicators	
Percentage of households receiving Medicaid or other governmental assistance that own a laptop or computer	Percentage of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander individuals with a laptop or computer.
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%	Near-term: Increase by 5% Long-term: Increase by 10%

[306] The WSBO recognizes that there are different ways to measure poverty. The 150% federal poverty level established as a criteria in the Digital Equity Planning Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is lower than both the ACP's eligibility criteria of 200% federal poverty level and the recommended Washington State Self-Sufficiency Standard. Further discussion and research are needed to reconcile these gaps to support low-income households.

5.1.3 Strategy 3: Consolidate Practices That Promote Online Accessibility and Inclusivity

Advocating for inclusive online experiences allows for all Washingtonians to have the ability to access and participate in digital society. Covered populations, such as individuals experiencing language barriers, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals living with a disability expressed the need for a more equitable online experience. These features include 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
• Develop partnership with Washington Technology Solutions and Department of Services for the Blind for a consolidation of good practices in optimizing online accessibility in alignment with the Washington State Office of the Chief Information Office Policy #188 – Accessibility.[307] • Identify and strengthen regional trusted messenger organizations and programs such as digital navigators, BATs, tribes, counties, and coalitions focused on digital equity to expand awareness of online accessibility resources. • Identify and invest in programs that serve covered populations, but do not yet provide digital skill and accessibility training, to expand services to include digital navigation, multilingual technical support, or digital skill building. • Host digital inclusion conference to promote sharing of good practices related to online accessibility. • Gather language and online accessibility good practices for Commerce that can be disseminated to other state agencies and partner organizations. • Develop and disseminate multilingual "plain language" digital navigator curriculum content to assist individuals with language barriers.
Description
Sharing information about programs such as digital navigators with covered populations through trusted messengers can help increase the reach of these programs. 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. The expansion of similar programs and use of trusted messengers can support online accessibility and inclusivity by providing channels to share information that will reach covered populations. The WSBO and the DEU can conduct outreach to organizations working in digital equity to help with collecting and disseminating good practice guidelines and resources for language access and online accessibility. These resources can serve as a reference for other state agencies and organizations interested in adopting similar practices. Good practice guidelines can be applied to how the Digital Equity Capacity Grants Program is implemented and iterated on as needs may change over time.

[307] Washington Technology Solutions (n.d.), Accessibility Policies. Accessed at: https://watech.wa.gov/policies/accessibility.

5.1.3.2 Measuring Success for Online Accessibility and Inclusivity

The WSBO intends to encourage feedback from covered populations and community partners to understand the user experience on government websites. This may 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 and resources related to language access and accessibility of online resources. This effort can be supported by partnering with Washington Technology Solutions to leverage their knowledge on the Washington State Office of the Chief Information Office Policy #188 – Accessibility in creating good practice guidelines and language access standards. To measure the success of these strategies, the sub-objective will include increasing multilingual plain language resources available, such as digital navigator curriculum material and gathering data from internet service providers on the types of multilingual services and accessibility tools they offer to customers.[308]

Goal 1: Eliminate Barriers	
Strategy 3	Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity
Universal Objective 3	Support inclusive practices that allow access to digital services regardless for everyone
Sub-objectives	
3.1 Individuals with a Language Barrier	**3.2 Individuals with a Language Barrier and/or Disability**
Increased multilingual resources available related to digital inclusion activities	Encourage the improvement of technical support offerings from internet service providers to include multilingual services and accessibility tools to assist both individuals with disabilities and individuals with limited English proficiency in a culturally/ linguistically appropriate way
Baseline Data	
• 9 of 39 **counties** mentioned language access as a barrier to digital equity in their CAPs[309] • Over 120 languages spoken in Washington[310] • 20.5% of persons over age five speak a language other than English at home • *Standardized digital navigator curriculum resources are under development (see **Section 5.1.4.4**)*	*Baseline will be determined through surveying BEAD applicants on if they offer any multilingual services or accessibility tools to customers*
Key Performance Indicators	

[308] Washington Governor's Office (2005). Plain Language: General Guidelines. Accessed at: https://governor.wa.gov/issues/efficient-government/plain-talk/general-guidelines
[309] Review of Community Action Plans. Accessed at: https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/v/CommunityActionPlans/folder/218672886930
[310] U.S. Census Bureau (2023). ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2022. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/search?ds=ACSPUMS1Y2022&cv=HISPEED&rv=HHLANP&nv=ucgid&wt=PWGTP&g=0400000US53

Number of languages that multilingual resources are available in for digital equity related curriculum available through partners like Digital Navigator grantees and other state agencies	Number of multilingual and accessible technical support offerings offered by internet service providers participating in the BEAD program
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term: Digital literacy curriculum materials shared on Internet for All website available in top five most widely spoken languages in Washington Long-term: Digital literacy curriculum materials shared on Internet for All website in top 15 most widely spoken languages in Washington	Near-term: Establish baseline and share results Long-term: Work with ISPs to set annual improvement target

5.1.4 Strategy 4: Provide Services That Increase Digital Literacy

As more individuals connect to the internet through the expansion of broadband services across Washington, digital literacy skills will become essential to provide the knowledge necessary to navigate the digital world safely and comfortably. Several activities implemented by Washington assist with expanding digital literacy trainings.

5.1.4.1 Activity 4.1: Build upon lessons learned through the Washington State Digital Navigator Program and statewide organizations that offer digital navigation, digital literacy, or digital skill trainings to expand programs designed to address unique needs of covered populations.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Continue to build on the success of programs such as the digital navigators by expanding partnerships with CAIs, particularly those best positioned to serve individuals with limited to no English proficiency, to embed the digital navigator curriculum into programs that may not be digitally focused but serve covered populations.
- Engage state agencies, such as DCYF, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and the Interagency Council on Homelessness, which support covered populations to adopt digital navigator programs.
- Coordinate with DOC and Reentry Council staff and program providers to expand training programs and upskill incarcerated individuals through reentry digital navigation services.
- Leverage digital literacy and digital skills training provided by community and technical colleges, in partnership with community-based organizations. This training is currently provided to students within basic education programming, English language acquisition classes for adults, and workforce training 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 could 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 for 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. Embedding digital literacy, digital navigation, and/or digital skill training into programs already providing based education and English language acquisition classes will be crucial in ensuring that the most disadvantaged individuals are receiving the support necessary to reduce the digital divide. Increased funding would also 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 existing programs to expand community partnerships that provide increased knowledge and skills enabling covered populations to participate in changing workforce and societal 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.
- Work with community partners to increase the public's awareness about digital resources available related to telehealth, education, workforce training and opportunities, ways to participate in civic and social engagement, and access to essential services.

Description

The WSBO and the DEU support 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 and the DEU 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 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 courses pulled together by the SBCTC as a preliminary resource, the WSBO can coordinate with statewide educational institutions and workforce development organizations to support digital skill building that tie into workforce needs. The WSBO and the DEU can also convene discussions with community colleges, technical schools, local workforce development boards, ISPs, and others in the

development of training programs to increase 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 is also connecting with the Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board) in relation to their digital literacy and information technology (IT) Career Equity legislative decision package to find ways to intersect 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.

In addition to workforce training and economic opportunities, there are many potential community partners with whom the WSBO can collaborate to increase awareness about digital resources (e.g., telehealth, education, civic and social engagement opportunities, essential services). Many of these potential community partners are listed as digital inclusion assets in Appendix 7.2 These partnerships could take numerous forms, such as listing resources on the WSBO's website or partnering on awareness campaigns.

5.1.4.3 Activity 4.3: Build on existing partnership with the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (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 OSPI.
- Partner with OSPI, community organizations, and school districts to optimize existing funding opportunities and programming, such as by uplifting 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 and the DEU's Digital Navigator Program intend to continue strengthening their partnership with OSPI, understanding the office's crucial role in bringing connectivity to schools, and by extension, to students, families, and communities. OSPI has several ongoing digital literacy and inclusion programs and opportunities for funding that have 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 OSPI, the WSBO and the DEU can leverage their expertise to support, expand, and highlight existing programming.

5.1.4.4 Activity 4.4 Develop a standardized publicly available digital skill training curriculum and resources.

KEY COMPONENTS

- Conduct a desktop review of digital skills frameworks and existing lesson material related to digital skill topics, e.g., National Digital Inclusion Alliance resources.[311]
- Document experiences of digital navigators, and gather material and lessons learned to develop a curriculum with increasing skill levels as individuals advance in their training.
- Build out a curriculum and associated multilingual, plain language, and accessible resources.

Description

The current cohort of the Digital Navigator Program consortiums is working on developing a standardized digital skill curriculum module that will be available on the Digital Navigator website for anyone to reference and integrate into their work. Libraries and OSPI will also be involved with the curriculum development. The content focus will be for older adult and student-focused areas of need identified. This work is funded through the current Digital Navigator grantee funding.

5.1.4.5 Measuring Success for Digital Literacy

Various methods and tools can be used to measure the success of the efforts put forth to improve digital literacy in Washington. 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 tools can also assess digital skills and knowledge in a standardized manner. It may be recommended that programs across the state utilize standardized assessment tools to create a baseline and measure the success of their programs upon participants' completion.[312] Washington State Library is working on a Digital Skills Assessment report that will be submitted to the state legislature in June 2025.

For a statewide measure of success, the WSBO will track the number of covered populations enrolling in programs under their purview. A baseline will be established in the first year of implementation. To address the gaps identified in current state, local, or private efforts, the Digital Navigators Program grantees intend to expand their partnerships with organizations, councils, and program managers that serve individuals experiencing housing instability and foster care families. The WSBO, in collaboration with the DEU, will initiate outreach to communicate the need to expand digital literacy and digital navigation services to the DSHS, DOC, and other agencies serving covered populations. The dialogue will also include a direct request to collect data on the level of digital literacy of their populations, to be incorporated for annual progress reporting. The data collected will assist with statewide tracking of the progress and success of these strategies.

[311] National Digital Inclusion Alliance (2022). "Planning to Build a New Digital Skills Curriculum? Read This First." Accessed at: https://www.digitalinclusion.org/blog/2022/08/31/planning-to-build-a-new-digital-skills-curriculum-read-this-first/.

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

Goal 2: Empower Residents	
Strategy 4	Provide services that promote digital literacy.
Universal objective 4	Washingtonians have opportunities to acquire the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity activities.
Sub-objectives	
4.1 All covered populations (except incarcerated individuals – see Sub-objective 4.2)	**4.2 Incarcerated individuals**
Increase opportunities for covered populations to receive digital navigation services	Include digital navigation services as part of wraparound services to support reentry
Baseline Data	
In 2023: 155,651 individuals assisted by Digital Navigator Program (breakdown by covered populations not available from all grantees)[313] *Future cohorts of the Digital Navigator Program will have more information on numbers by specific covered populations. The DEU will work with other partners who are offering digital skill to gather data on other trainings being offered.*	In 2023: 149 interactions with incarcerated individuals[314]
Key Performance Indicators	
Number of interactions with digital navigators (all covered populations except incarcerated individuals)	Number of interactions with digital navigators for incarcerated individuals
Near- and Long-term Targets	
Near-term target: Increase by 10% relative to covered population baseline Long-term target: Increase by 20% relative to covered population baseline	Near-term target: Increase by 20% relative to baseline Long-term target: Increase by 40%relative to baseline

[313] Digital Equity Unit (2024). Digital Navigator Program Data. Shared over email.
[314] Connect Washington (2024). Digital Navigation Monthly Reporting Dashboard. Results filtered for 2023 "Correctional" population. Accessed at: https://connect-wa.org/digital-navigation-monthly-reporting/

5.1.5 Strategy 5: Promote Practices and Leverage Tools to Enable Online Privacy and Security

Online protection and safety are essential to encouraging 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 be safe online.

5.1.5.1 Activity 5.1: Leverage the Digital Navigator Program and other digital skills education providers 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 cybersecurity 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 skills education related services.
Description
The Digital Navigator Program, which is housed in Commerce's DEU, is one example of programming essential for providing digital support for covered populations. These types of 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. A cybersecurity training module is planned for integration into the standard state Digital Navigator curriculum that is under development.

5.1.5.2 Activity 5.2: Support the Statewide Cybersecurity Strategy to protect data and privacy of covered populations 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 Opportunity. • 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 the DEU, local governments, and community groups can assist in reaching covered populations by disseminating information to their communities through listservs, printed pamphlets, community bulletins, and other platforms. These skills and tools can also be shared with communities through programming such as digital navigators, providing hands-on tools to remain safe online.

5.1.5.3 Activity 5.3: Partner with internet service providers (ISPs) to promote cybersecurity education.

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 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 will be incentivized to participate by including secondary selection criteria that awards points to applicants who participate in digital adoption and digital navigation activities with their subscribers.

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 and the Washington State Office of the Attorney General, where cyber incidents are reported. To supplement the Federal Trade Commission's data related to fraud reporting, the WSBO, in partnership with the DEU, can explore gathering information from digital navigators and ISPs to better understand if and how information related to online privacy and cybersecurity is being distributed and uncover opportunities to improve communication to covered populations.

Goal 2: Empower Residents	
Strategy 5	Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security.
Universal objective 5	Advancing measures that keep Washingtonians safe and protected online from cyber threats.
Baseline Data	
35 per 100,000 population fraud reports related to internet services reported in the Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel Network for the 2022.[315]	
Key Performance Indicators	
Number of fraud reports related to internet services per 100,000 population (all covered populations)	

[315] Federal Trade Commission (2023). FTC Consumer Sentinel Network. Accessed at: Tableau FTC Consumer Sentinel Network. Note: The Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel Network uses 2021 Census state population estimate, but the number was calculated using the 2022 Census estimates so there is a slight decrease in the ratio. Internet service-related reports include problems with website content; difficulty canceling an ISP or online account; issues with online payment services, social networking services, internet gaming, and virtual reality; undisclosed charges; website design and promotion services; and problems with broadband internet services and content, including the truthfulness of cost, access, and speed disclosures.

Goal 2: Empower Residents
Near- and Long-term Targets
Near-term: Reduce by 10% Long-term: Reduce by 25%

5.1.6 Strategy 6: Embed Digital Equity Considerations into Larger Statewide Efforts to Advance the Sustainability of this Work

5.1.6.1 Activity 6.1: Work with partners to explore sustainable funding mechanisms that allow more state agencies, community anchor institutions, and community-based organizations to adopt digital equity programs.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Collaborate with Digital Navigator consortiums, community anchor institutions, and state agency partners to demonstrate impact of digital navigation services and outcomes. • Work with Digital Navigator consortium leaders to coordinate a statewide cohort of state agencies, community-based organizations, and other nonprofit digital equity leaders to map program and policy assets and identify opportunities for how digital navigation services can be integrated into existing operational budgets. • Review and support legislation that shores up the sustainability of digital navigation and other digital equity related services. • Support capacity of partners to pursue diverse funding opportunities, including public, public-private, and philanthropic opportunities.
Description
Sustainable funding for programs is an ongoing concern for digital equity practitioners across the state. Without a sustained funding stream, it is difficult to continue the momentum that has been developed through the Digital Navigator Program. It is also difficult to scale the work of organizations documented in the Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory (**Appendix 7.2**) and others that may not have been captured. The WSBO and the DEU intend to work with a broad array of partners invested in digital equity work to support legislative opportunities that can establish sustainable funding mechanisms. This will enable more organizations to embed digital navigation into their service delivery operations so that it becomes normalized rather than viewed as an ancillary technology-related service. Additionally, the WSBO can work with partners to identify where there may be other opportunities to fund digital inclusion activities.

5.1.6.2 Activity 6.2: Support collective impact model for reducing digital illiteracy and to build on-ramps to IT-related career paths.

KEY COMPONENTS
• Coordinate with state agencies, workforce development organizations, educational institutions, and nonprofits working on the Digital Literacy & IT Career Equity decision package using a 'collective impact model'. • Work with the Workforce Board, local workforce development boards, SBCTC and other partners to foster public-private partnerships through the proposed Public-Private New Program Fund to provide business with the opportunity to rapidly access funds for locally responsive training when no nearby programs exist.
Description
Washington state is home to many of the largest technology companies in the world in addition to many other businesses that would benefit from a highly digitally skilled workforce, including those who will be applying for the BEAD program to expand internet services across the state. Working together with a wide array of partners including nonprofits, governments, businesses, and members of the public will be required to tackle the issue of digital illiteracy and to advance sustainability in this work. The collective impact model requires cross-sectoral partnerships to be effective. The fulfillment of collective impact also requires centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process to share measurement, communication and reinforce activities among all participants.[316] While the specific decision package referenced above still needs to be voted on by the state legislature, regardless of the outcome, the concept and model for collective impact will provide a framework for how the WSBO will approach its digital equity programming and communication. To reiterate, interconnection between efforts from the state, tribal, and local partners and the public and private sector is critical to tackling a challenge as multifaceted as digital inequity and the intersectionality of barriers that individuals face.

5.1.6.3 Measuring Success for Sustainability

The complexity and breadth of digital inclusion activities that need to be conducted and amount of funding needed extend far beyond the capabilities of any single state agency or organization. For any of the previous strategies to be successful in the long-term, they will require mechanisms for sustainability. Developing strong and engaged partnerships with a robust network of digital equity champions and tribes across the state will be critical to advocate for funding, to conduct the work, and to measure progress. The Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory (**Appendix 7.2**) will be updated annually, and as part of that work potential partnerships will be mapped to see if there are areas that need to be strengthened in addition. For example, if more outreach needs to be conducted with a specific covered population with whom specific partners are the best messengers.

[316] Kania, J. and Kramer, M. (2011). Stanford Social Innovation Review. Accessed at: Collective Impact (ssir.org).

Goal 3: Advance Sustainability	
Strategy 6	Embed digital equity considerations into larger statewide efforts to advance the sustainability of this work.
Universal objective 6	Advance statewide partnerships with tribal governments, state agencies, community-based organizations, businesses, and other digital equity focused organizations to sustain digital equity work.

Baseline Data

- There are currently 79 assets listed on the Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory.[317]
- In 2023 there were 1,476 unique visitors to the Internet for All in Washington website.

Key Performance Indicators

- Awareness of Internet for All in Washington website resources and the Digital Equity Dashboard once the dashboard is published.
- Work with partners to update Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory annually.
- Capacity of partners to apply for funding

Near- and Long-term Targets

Near-term:

- Increase website visits by 10%
- At least one partner organization applies for the NTIA's Competitive Digital Equity Program

Long-term:

- Increase website visits by 20%
- Digital navigation is embedded into at least one additional state agency's services

[317] Note: Individual programs run by the state's 348 public library branch locations are not listed individually and are grouped under the category of "Libraries" as a single asset. In future years if more details on individual library programs are available this may be broken out into further detail.

5.2 TIMELINE

The timeline below sequences the implementation of the strategies over the next five years, depending on the NTIA timeline. The table below illustrates planning as well as years for implementation for each strategy. The WSBO and the DEU plan 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
★	Milestone

Table 37: 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 Coordinate with Washington state's BEAD program to align with digital equity goals.					
1.2 Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in low-cost and subsidized broadband service for low-income communities.					
1.3 Utilize Washington state's Digital Equity Dashboard to measure progress in broadband services for covered populations.	★ Stand up Digital Equity Dashboard				
1.4 Support Washington state's CAIs to improve and increase the number of free, public Wi-Fi locations.					
1.5 Solicit innovative solutions that can increase broadband affordability and adoption among hard-to-reach covered populations or subgroups					
Strategy 2: Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability					
2.1 Partner with ISPs, CAIs, and device distributors to develop awareness campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile network/hotspots, and free, subsidized, or low-cost device programs.		★ Kick off state-wide awareness campaign			
2.2 Develop innovative programs like statewide device repair, refurbishment, reuse, and recycling programs to increase device affordability and availability.					
Strategy 3: Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity.					
3.1 Partner with trusted messenger programs and organizations to share information about digital assistance and online accessibility with covered populations.					

Timeline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy.					
4.1 Build upon lessons learned through the Washington State Digital Navigator Program and statewide organizations that offer digital navigation, digital literacy, or digital skill trainings to expand programs designed to address unique needs of covered populations.			★ Stand-up digital navigators in a state agency		
4.2 Leverage existing programs to expand community partnerships that provide increased knowledge and skills enabling covered populations to participate in changing workforce and societal needs.					
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.					
4.4 Develop a standardized publicly available digital skill training curriculum and resources.					
Strategy 5: Promote practices and leverage tools to ensure online privacy and security.					
5.1 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.					
5.2 Support the Statewide Cybersecurity Strategy to protect data and privacy of covered populations online.		★ Initiate Cybersecurity Best Practices Campaign			
5.3 Partner with ISPs to promote cybersecurity education.					
Strategy 6: Embed digital equity considerations into larger statewide efforts to advance the sustainability of this work.					
6.1 Work with partners to explore sustainable funding mechanisms that could allow more state agencies, community anchor institutions, and community organizations to adopt digital equity programs.					
6.2 Support collective impact model for reducing digital illiteracy and to build on-ramps to IT-related career paths.					

6. CONCLUSION

As emphasized by individuals who participated in public engagement sessions, digital connectivity is essential to Washingtonian's daily lives. In tandem with the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) planning documents, this Digital Equity Plan will support the state with the delivery of affordable, accessible broadband to all residents, businesses, and communities in Washington. This Digital Equity Plan serves as a foundation to show how Washington state will use National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA's) Digital Equity Capacity Grant to reach the Washington State Broadband Office 's (WSBO's) statewide goals of eliminating barriers to broadband and digital device access and affordability, empowering residents, and ensuring sustainability of digital equity services.

The WSBO and the Digital Equity Unit have intentionally developed this Digital Equity Plan in close collaboration with diverse stakeholders, tribal partners, and state agencies in hopes of designing a strategy that embeds statewide efforts to assist with achieving Washington's digital equity goals. The WSBO aims to best serve all residents who are unserved and or underserved, while recognizing there is more to be done to center their voices in the decision-making process. As such, the Washington State Digital Equity Plan presents strategies and outreach methods to reach the populations who 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 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.

There is recognition among digital equity advocates in the state that given how quickly technology is advancing, the goalposts for digital literacy will continue to move. For example, during public engagement events numerous participants expressed interest and concern in the implications of artificial intelligence advances or all services moving online to the point where in-person services for essential services would no longer be available.

As the state expands the availability of broadband service through the BEAD Program and other broadband funding programs, Washington state will continue to build on its strong foundation of community-based digital equity planning to reflect evolving needs.[318] Availability of internet

[318] Visit the Internet for All in Washington website for more information in the BEAD Five-Year Action Plan and Initial Proposal.

service alone is insufficient for people to fully participate in a digital society if it is not affordable. It is also essential to have the adequate skills, quality equipment and devices like modern routers and computing devices.[319] This is why coordinating activities funded by the BEAD Program and the Digital Equity Program will be critical to complement availability-, affordability-, and adoption-related work and outreach to communities. The state will also continue to invest in programs that support digital equity, ranging from the Digital Navigator Program, platforms like the Digital Equity Forum, and opportunities for local partners and tribal governments to build capacity to support future sustainable digital inclusion activities and deliver on the premise of "Internet for All."

[319] Computing devices should also include accessories like mice, large screen monitors, and headsets that facilitate ease of use for work, education, telehealth, and other essential services.

7. APPENDICES

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

Digital Equity Plan Requirements (DE 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.	2.3.2, 5.1
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)	2.2.3, 2.2.1
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, Appendix 7.5
6	A stated vision for digital equity	1.2, 2.1
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 incorporated 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
12	An explanation of how the implementation strategy addresses gaps in existing state, local, and private efforts to address identified barriers	5.1

Digital Equity Plan Requirements (DE NOFO)		Section
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, 2.2.3
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	2.2.2–2.2.3
16	A description of any changes made to the Digital Equity Plan in response to comments received and inclusion of a written response to each comment received	Local coordination tracker

7.2 Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory

Table 38: Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory (to be updated over time)

Asset	Description
Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)	The ACP is a Federal Communications Commission (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	Answers Integrated Digital Empowerment assists individuals who have a household income below 200% of the federal poverty level with applying for the ACP, 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 device or pay for the discounted internet bill.
Asian Counseling and Referral Service's Ready to Work	The Asian Counseling and Referral Service offers a comprehensive Ready to Work program helping people with very limited English overcome language barriers, gain digital literacy skills, find meaningful employment, and achieve economic self-sufficiency.
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, aging individuals, 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 for 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.
Centers for Independent Living	Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are non-residential, private, non-profit, consumer-controlled, community-based organizations. They provide services and advocacy by and for persons with all types of disabilities. Their goal is to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential within their families and communities to achieve and maintain independent living. Several CILs provide resources and training related to technology and communication, and in particular assistive technology.

Asset	Description
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 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.
Committee for Accessible Technology Oversight	The Committee for Accessible Technology Oversight advises several SBCTC councils and commissions on matters of accessibility and technology, while supporting the creation of annual work plans and monitoring progress on their achievements. The committee is also responsible for making recommendations, establishing guidelines, and disseminating best practices for technology accessibility.
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 help with resource navigation to find options for low-income cell phones, low-income internet service.
Community Anchor Institutions	Numerous institutions play a pivotal role in serving as digital inclusion assets for their local communities. While it is not possible to list every program or service provided by CAIs, Washington's Initial Proposal Volume I includes a list of CAIs in the state that facilitates greater use of broadband service by vulnerable populations.
Community for the Advancement of Family Education	Community for the Advancement of Family Education 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 ACP.
Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program	The Community Health Network of Washington's Link to Care Program serves patients remotely in 39 counties across Washington. 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.
Computing for All	The Computing for All program 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 older adults 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 older adults gain access to adequate technology training and intergenerational communities that keep them socially connected and engaged.

Asset	Description
DeafBlind Services Center	The DeafBlind Services 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 (DOC), Legislative Directive Senate Bill (SB) 5092	SB 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 (DOC), Reentry Navigation Services	The DOC 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.
Department of Services for the Blind	Washington State Department of Services for the Blind provides services for people of all ages who are blind or have low vision in the state of Washington. The agency provides services to more than 2,800 Washington State Residents to help them gain or retain employment. Services include assistance obtaining assistive technology devices including phones and tablets, instruction for clients on how to use phones and computers to stay in touch with family and friends, and information on how to make information accessible on documents and websites.
Department of Vocational Rehabilitation	The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is a statewide resource that assists people with disabilities to prepare for, secure, maintain, advance in, or regain employment. It partners with businesses and organizations to develop employment opportunities. It also serves people who seek meaningful and secure employment, but whose disabilities may result in one or more barriers to achieving employment goals.
Digital Equity Learning Network of King County	Digital Equity Learning Network of King County is a 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 Digital Equity Unit and works closely with community partners and grantees. Digital Navigators can help individuals navigate the internet, sign up for the ACP, 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
Evergreen Goodwill	For over 13 years, Evergreen Goodwill Northwest has been providing free digital skills training to covered populations across five counties in the Puget Sound area. Evergreen Goodwill developed a "Digital Equity Bus" to serve as a mobile classroom in partnership with Black & Veatch to bring computer classes, workforce development programs, and wraparound support services directly to people in rural and historically under resourced communities across Northwest Washington. Evergreen Goodwill previously provided Digital Navigation services through 2022 using a Commerce-sponsored grant.
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.
Hopelink	Hopelink, a community action agency with service centers in north and east King County, provides a network of services through several different programs, including housing, transportation, family development, energy assistance, emergency financial assistance, food markets, employment coaching, financial education, and adult education. Adult education includes a Digital Skills Program, which offers one-on-one support, resource navigation (such as affordable Internet), workshops, and classes, as well as English Language and GED®/High School Completion Programs, which integrate digital skills into instruction. Students have free access to borrow Chromebooks and can apply for tech scholarships to purchase devices of their own.
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 ACP 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 Program, Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)	The Independent Living 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.
Individual Technology Services	DOC partnered with Securus Technologies to provide Individual Technology Services (phone calls, video visitation, e-messaging, media), which are accessed through a tablet. Incarcerated individuals receive a limited number of free weekly phone calls, monthly video connect sessions, and free stamps for e-messaging.

Asset	Description
InterConnection	InterConnection is a nonprofit organization 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.
King County Library System	The King County Library System providers makerspaces that allow its patrons to explore hands on technology in areas such as robotics, coding, digitalization, design, and engineering. It also provides digital literacy classes and instruction for people of all ages and abilities and distributes laptops and hotspot kits to various partner organizations' clients in its service area. A strong emphasis of the laptop/hotspot program is for those in the community experiencing housing insecurity or at risk of becoming unhoused to help reduce barriers people may have getting to the library
Kitsap Computing Seniors	Kitsap Computing Seniors is an all-volunteer organization for aging individuals who want to help increase each other's knowledge, skills and enjoyment of computers and technology. They offer digital literacy classes and training for aging individuals, as well as assist with device procurement and repair.
Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center	Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center 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 ACP enrollment.
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.
Libraries	Public libraries serve as important community anchor institutions. For example, during 2022 over 17 million annual visits were recorded in Washington state libraries. Communities often visit libraries for digital navigation services, laptops and hotspots on loan, access points for critical services like telehealth, and access to computer labs, printers, Wi-Fi, and numerous other educational and informational services.[320]
Lift Zones	Comcast's Lift Zones provide free Wi-Fi hotspots in spaces designated to help students and families get online. A map of lift zones is provided on the company website.
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.

[320] Washington State Library (2022), 2022 Annual Library Service Measures. Accessed at: https://apps.sos.wa.gov/_assets/library/libraries/libDev/2022stats.pdf

Asset	Description
Mercy Housing Northwest	Mercy Housing Northwest owns and operates 54 properties throughout Washington and Idaho, providing over 5,000 families and aging individuals 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 available to residents through their properties as well.
Metropolitan Development Council	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 and Computers for Community to provide computers to children in need. NCW Tech also offers Project iLumina, which is a rural resilience and digital inclusion campaign that brings resources to rural communities. Additionally, it offers Tech Help to provide access to digital resources and the skills and support needed to engage online effectively for community members in need.
Northwest Center	Northwest Center is a leader in advancing equal opportunities for children and adults with developmental disabilities. They provide services in a wide range of areas including early childhood education, after school programs, supported employment, job training, and placement.
Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center	The Northwest Regional Telehealth Resource Center serves a seven-state region (AK, WA, OR, MT, ID, WY, UT) to advance the development, implementation, and integration of telehealth through sharing information, leveraging resources, and creating a synergistic telehealth community.
Off State Network	The OSN is designed to allow access to other entities outside of DOC to use cloud access to share real-time information that can be used for education and workforce development purposes. The network is available through computers with wired connections in classrooms and in law libraries.
Olympic Area Agency on Aging	The Olympic Area Agency on Aging operates a Mobile Assistance Van that travels throughout the county providing information and assistance. They serve as a single entry-point for services for disabled adults and aging adults in Grays Harbor, Pacific, Clallam, and Jefferson Counties in western Washington state. Additionally, they aid homebound aging adults by supporting pilots such as ElliQ, which serves homebound aging adults and promotes safety, health, and physical and emotional well-being.
Organización Centro Americana	Organización Centro Americana 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.

Asset	Description
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	Pateros Brewster Community Resource Center 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.
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 Inclusión Solidaridad y Empoderamiento	The Grays Harbor RISE Coalition brings together agencies serving the Spanish speaking and Latinx 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.
Seattle Housing Authority Digital Navigation	The Seattle Housing Authority Digital Navigation Program 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
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.

Asset	Description
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 Introduction 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. This nonprofit provides 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 aging individuals.
Sound Learning	Sound Learning has consistently provided quality, accessible, innovative, and relevant education programs to a diverse community of learners (adults and out of school youth 16+) representing varied educational, economic, cultural, and language backgrounds since 1991 in Mason County and 2006 in Thurston County. Classes and tutoring focus on information and skills, including English language, that are needed to succeed in the community, support themselves and/or their families, gain, keep, or excel in employment, and be prepared to succeed in training or college courses. Gaining or improving digital skills is essential to success for their participants and families.
Special Technology Access Resource Center	The Special Technology Access Resource Center at the Seattle Housing Authority 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.
Tacoma Community House	Tacoma Community House works with adult learners to gain English, math, employment, and digital literacy skills to further their goals of self-sufficiency. For over 100 years, they have helped individuals navigate a new culture and find personal and professional success through employment, education, immigration support, and community engagement.
TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk (Equity in Education Coalition)	The TechConnect Washington Community Helpdesk provides free multi-lingual, multi-cultural technical support to Washington residents to help them engage in a virtual environment. Helpdesk technicians provide technical guidance, digital navigation support, and connections to other community resources, such as telehealth calls, and online access to food, rental assistance, and socio-emotional supports. The program supports all community members including parents, students, and aging individuals.

Asset	Description
The Carl Maxey Center	The Carl Maxey Center is a Black-led and Black-centered non-profit that acts as a neighborhood culture center, which provides programs 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 students who struggled with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent students of color from falling further before.
Treehouse Educational Advocacy Program	Treehouse Educational Advocates support students in foster care by providing timely, appropriate educational supports and interventions tailored to everyone'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.
Tribal Employment Rights Offices	A Tribal Employment Rights Office is the unit within the tribal government structure that monitors and enforces Tribal employment rights ordinances and facilitates the employment of American Indians and Alaska Natives in businesses and industries operating within the geographical boundaries of the reservation. They can also provide referral and placement resources between employers and residents of the reservation and negotiate tribal preference agreements.[321]
Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation	Unidos Nueva Alianza Foundation protects and promotes the rights of immigrants, Latinx, and underrepresented communities through advocacy, support through services, and resources. It serves nine counties in Washington and provides digital navigation services and phone distribution.
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle	The Urban League Metropolitan Seattle works to empower African Americans and other diverse underserved communities to thrive by securing educational and economic opportunities. It 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 ACP.
Valeo Vocation	Valeo Vocation combats poverty and homelessness in Pierce County by offering quick access to income, which is 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.

[321] U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.) Frequently Asked Questions about Indian Tribes and Tribal Employment Rights Offices. Accessed at: https://www.eeoc.gov/frequently-asked-questions-about-indian-tribes-and-tribal-employment-rights-offices

Asset	Description
Villa Comunitaria	Villa Comunitaria provides the program Aula Digital en Acción (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 Assistive Technology Act Program	The Washington 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 (SBCTC)	The SBCTC advocates, coordinates, and directs Washington state's system of 34 public community and technical colleges and partner community-based organizations*. These institutions of learning often provide free Wi-Fi, computer centers, digital skills training, and workforce development courses related to technological skills. **SBCTC-funded adult basic education CBOs: Literacy Source (King County) Hopelink (King County), Community Action of Skagit County (Skagit County), Tacoma Community House (Pierce County), and Sound Learning (Mason County).*
Washington State Library	Washington State Library's LinkedIn Learning Program provides statewide access to Linkedin Learning covering business, technology, and creative courses. The resource is free of charge with a library card from any Washington public library via the libraries' websites in English, French, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Spanish. The Washington State Library-funded subscription is free to all Washingtonians. The State Library system also provides access to the Northstar Digital Literacy Program's self-directed assessment and learning tool that covers a variety of technology scenarios. It comes with short lessons and practice exercises to improve skills in a number of common computer topics. The Northstar resource is available on local public library websites. Library staff are available to help with the resource during regular hours. Another resource is the statewide database licensing project which allows Washington libraries to leverage their resources to gain more cost-effective access to database projects. Washington State Library coordinates with Washington libraries so that all Washingtonians can have access to a range of electronic database products to address their informational and educational needs.
Washington State School for the Blind	The school supports visually- impaired, blind, or deaf-blind students. Services include a support system for access technology needs across the state. There are plans to expand assistance options to include in-person and virtual formats, enhanced assessment offerings, professional development, and the addition of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics support.
Washington State University-Extension 4-H Tech Changers Program	4-H Tech Changemakers help 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

Asset	Description
Workforce Development Boards	There are 12 regional workforce areas in Washington overseen by Workforce Development Boards. Local workforce development boards partner with businesses and educational institutions to provide a variety of workforce resources and services including some services specific to covered populations such as veterans. For example, veterans can access computers and other devices at WorkSource centers and receive skills assessments sand training. The Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County also maintains a Digital Equity Asset Map for their service area.
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. These services provide in-person computer skills training and virtual learning opportunities.
Youth Empowerment Program, Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (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 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 Community Action Plans Link. In some instances, counties or tribes did not provide complete information. Sixteen tribes participated in this process with four tribes partnering with neighboring counties and 12 tribes submitting information independently.

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 per month. 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 per month.

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 per 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 per 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 supplies 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.

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 per 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 can 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 Education Network 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.

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 That Participated in Public Engagement Activities in 2023

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

Table 39: List of Organizations That Participated in Engagement Activities as of December 2023

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Civil Rights Organization
Equity in Education Coalition
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Community Anchor Institution
ANSWERS Counseling
Asotin County Library
Burlington Public Library
Fort Vancouver Regional Library
Jefferson County Library District
Kitsap Regional Library
Liberty School District
Libraries of Stevens County
North Olympic Library System
Seattle Public Library
Sno-isle Libraries
Tacoma Public Library
Upper Skagit Library
Washington State Library
Whitman County Rural Library District
County or Municipal Government
Asotin County
Benton-Franklin Council of Governments
City of Anacortes
City of College Place
City of Kennewick
City of Oak Harbor
City of Ocean Shores
City of Seattle
City of Spokane
City of Tukwila
Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments
Grays Harbor County
King County
King County Information Technology
Kitsap County

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Lincoln County
Pierce County
Snohomish County
Spokane
Town of Ione
Town of Wilkeson
Whatcom County
Whatcom County Public Works
Economic Development
Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
North Olympic Development Council
Waitsburg Commercial Club
Health or Telehealth Organization (Direct Service and Policy focus)
Cascade Wellness Clinic
North Valley Hospital
Willapa Behavioral Health & Wellness
Hispanic-serving Institution
HU-Yakima Valley Partners for Education
Industry Representative or Association (501c6)
CenterFuse
Ferry County Sunrise
IEEE
LightRiver Technologies
Washington Independent Telecommunications Association
Washington Public Utility District Association
Wireless Infrastructure Association
Institutions of Higher Education (if not listed above)
Edmonds College
Olympic College
University of Washington
Washington State University
Washington State University Extension
WSU Stevens County Extension
Internet Service Provider
Advanced Stream
Astound Business
Avista Edge, Inc.
BROADLINC
Columbia Energy LLC dba Columbia iConnect
Comcast
Commnet Rural America, LLC

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
CresComm Wi-Fi, LLC
Hood Canal Communications
Inland Cellular
Inland Networks
Interisland.net / Computer Place
Intermax
Klick Networks, LLC
LocalTel Communications
Lumen/CenturyLink
Monmouth Independence Networks
NoaNet
Ptera
Ranier Connect
Rock Island Communications
Silver Star Telecom
TDS Telecom
T-Mobile
ToledoTel
Velocity Communications Inc.
Vyve Broadband
Washington Broadband
Whidbey Telecom
WIFiBER
Ziply Fiber
Labor Organization or Union
Communications Workers of America
Local Education Agency
Dieringer School District
ESD 101
Naselle-Grays River Valley Schools
Oak Harbor Public Schools
Onalaska School District #300
Seattle Public Schools
Sunnyside School District
Nonprofit Organization (501c3)
Community Council
Goodwill Industries of the Columbia
Goodwill of the Olympics & Rainier Region
KNKX
NCW Tech Alliance
New Connections

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Pacific Northwest Gigapop
PNWER
Safe Homes
Snowden Community Council
Solid Ground
Technology Alliance
Underwood Park & Recreation District
Washington State Horse Park
YMCA of Greater Seattle
Organization that Represents Covered Populations
AARP Washington
Blue Mountain Action Council
Cambodian American Community Council of Washington
Comunidades sin Fronteras Washington
Latino Civic Alliance
Mother Africa
Recovery Career Services
Sound Generations
The Lighthouse for the Blind, Inc.
Other
ADTRAN
Asotin County Broadband Action Team also Asotin County Library
B Inside or Out
Digital Equity Learning Network of King County and Literacy Source
Discovery Bay Resort (RV Park)
Discovery Bay Women's Club
E-Copernicus
eXp Realty
Hood Canal Co-op
Horrocks
LeadToResults, LLC
Lewis County Broadband Action Team (LCBAT)
lightbox
Native Network Inc
NT SYSTEMS
NTIA
Pend Oreille County BAT
Prysmian Group
Seabeck Systems
StateScoop
Strategic Alliance Consulting Inc.

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
SWB Technology LLC
TEKsystems
Washington 211
WBE Technologies LLC
Port
Chelan Douglas Regional Port Authority
Port of Bellingham
Port of Clarkston
Port of Columbia
Port of Skagit
Port of Whitman County
Predominantly Black Institution
Black Brilliance Research
Public Housing Authority
Seattle Housing Authority
Walla Walla Housing Authority
Public Utility
Chelan County PUD
Grays Harbor PUD No.1
Kitsap Public Utility
Lewis County PUD
Mason PUD 3
Okanogan County Electric Cooperative
Pacific County PUD
Pacific County PUD #2
Public Utility No. 1 of Okanogan County
Snohomish County PUD
Whatcom PUD
State Agency
Aging and Long-Term Support Administration
Attorney General of Washington
Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Employment Security Department
Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
House of Representatives
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Public Works Board
Washington State Department of Health
Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington State Public Works Board
Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Stakeholder Organizations by Type
Washington State Broadband Office
Washington State Department of Corrections
Washington State Department of Enterprise Services
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Washington State Department of Transportation
Washington State Department of Commerce
Washington State Department of Financial Institutions
Washington State Office of Equity
Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission
Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board
Workforce Development Organization
Benton-Franklin Workforce Development Council (WDC)
Eastern Washington Partnership WDC
Future Workforce Alliance
Olympic WDC
Pacific Mountain WDC
Seattle Jobs Initiative
SkillSource Regional Workforce Board
South Central Workforce Council
Spokane Workforce Council
Washington Cradle to Career Advocacy Network
Washington Service Corps
Washington Workforce Association
Workforce Central
Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County
Workforce Southwest Washington

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

Please note that this table only provides an overview of the engagement activities through January 2024. For more detailed information on each of these engagement activities, including the covered populations engaged, please see the Local Coordination Tracker.

Table 40: List of Engagement Activities through January 2024

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Digital Equity (DE) Forum Meeting	3/3/2023	Virtual	All	40
Connectivity Strategy Team Meeting	3/15/2023	Virtual	All	16
Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) and DE in Washington Meeting	3/16/2023	Virtual	All	6
Interview with Public Works Board	3/16/2023	Virtual	All	2
Digital Navigator Cohort Monthly Meeting	3/21/2023	Virtual	All	35
Interview with Department of Transportation	3/21/2023	Virtual	All	3
Informal Meeting with Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe	3/27/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	1
Informal Meeting with Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe	3/28/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	1
Internet for All in Washington (IFA) Kickoff	3/29/2023	Virtual	All	330
Interview with City of Seattle & King County	4/4/2023	Virtual	King	2
Digital Equity and Tribal Broadband Leaders Network Meeting	4/6/2023	Virtual	All	378

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Discussion with Public Broadband Stakeholders Group	4/10/2023	Virtual	All	12
BEAD/DE Tribal Outreach Coordination	4/11/2023	Virtual	All	5
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI)/NTIA Discussion	4/12/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	8
Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO)/Broadband Action Team (BAT) at Washington State University (WSU)	4/13/2023	Virtual	All	10
SC/SP Monthly BAT	4/13/2023	Virtual	Stevens	15
Interview with Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	4/13/2023	Virtual	All	2
Interview with Community Economic Revitalization Board	4/13/2023	Virtual	All	1
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/13/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Digital Navigator Cohort Monthly Meeting	4/18/2023	Virtual	All	56
Interview with Equity in Education Coalition	4/18/2023	Virtual	All	3
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/19/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) Meeting	4/20/2023	Virtual	All	15
Interview with Goodwill	4/20/2023	Virtual	All	1

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/20/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/20/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Meeting with Councilmember from the City of Monroe	4/21/2023	Virtual	All	1
Meeting with Communications Workers of America	4/24/2023	Virtual	All	3
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/24/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/24/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/25/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/25/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/25/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/26/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	4/27/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Interview with Goodwill - Digital Navigator Program Managers	4/28/2023	Virtual	All	2
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/1/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/1/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/1/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Internet Service Provider and Public Utility District (PUD) Focus Group	5/3/2023	128 N 2nd Street, Yakima, WA 98901	All	12
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/3/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Consultation with Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation	5/3/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	
Sunnyside School District Listening Session	5/4/2023	1110 S. 6th Street, Sunnyside, WA. 98944	Yakima	30
Pahto Bus Outreach	5/4/2023	Yakama Nation	Yakima	20
Moses Lake Focus Group	5/5/2023	124 E. Third Suite 205 Moses Lake, WA 98837	Grant	5
Cinco de Mayo Festival	5/5/2023	Downtown Sunnyside, WA	Yakima	15
ATNI Conference	5/8/2023	Coeur d'Alene Casino, 37914 S Nukwalqw St, Worley, ID 83876	Tribal Engagement	12
Asotin Listening Session	5/9/2023	2377 Appleside Blvd., Clarkston, WA 99403	Asotin	5
ATNI Conference	5/9/2023	Coeur d'Alene Casino, 37914 S Nukwalqw St, Worley, ID 83876	Tribal Engagement	200

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/9/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/9/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Presentation to Washington Public Utility District Association (WPUDA)	5/10/2023	212 Union Ave SE, Ste 201, Olympia, WA, United States, Washington	All	--
Spokane Listening Session	5/10/2023	Spokane County Water Resource Center, 1004 N Freya St, Spokane, WA 99202	Spokane	17
ATNI Conference	5/10/2023	Coeur d'Alene Casino, 37914 S Nukwalqw St, Worley, ID 83876	Tribal Engagement	15
Informal Meeting with Spokane Tribe of Indians	5/10/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	3
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/10/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5
Okanogan Listening Session	5/11/2023	Public Utility District #1 Of Okanogan County, 1331 2nd Ave N, Okanogan WA 98840	Okanogan	15
Informal Meeting with Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Makah Tribe, and Samish Indian Nation	5/11/2023	Coeur d'Alene Casino, 37914 S Nukwalqw St, Worley, ID 83876	Tribal Engagement	10
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/12/2023	Virtual or in-person (Seattle, WA)	King	5

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Interview with Amanda Six	5/15/2023	Virtual	Stevens	1
Informal Meeting with Suquamish Tribe of Indians	5/15/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	1
Royal City Focus Group	5/19/2023	117 Camelia St. NW Royal City, WA. 99357	Franklin Grant	14
Informal Meeting with Makah Tribe	5/22/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	1
City of Seattle Focus Group	5/23/2023	Virtual or in-person	King	5
Informal Meeting with Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe	5/23/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	1
Interview with Joyce Abbott	5/24/2023	Virtual	All	1
Lower Columbia College Career Fair	5/25/2023	Lower Columbia Community College, 1600 Maple St, Longview, WA 98632	Cowlitz	18
Aberdeen Focus Group	5/26/2023	Grays Harbor County Public Health 2109 Sumner Ave. Aberdeen, WA 98520	Grays Harbor	8
Ocean Shores Focus Group	5/26/2023	Oceans Shore Lions Club, 832 Ocean Shores Blvd NW, Ocean Shores, WA 98569	Grays Harbor	9

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Forks Listening Session	5/30/2023	481 S Forks Ave, Forks, WA 98331	Clallam	5
Prescott Focus Group	5/30/2023	1111 Fishhook Park Road Prescott, WA. 99348	Franklin Walla Walla	16
Port Angeles Food Bank	5/31/2023	Port Angeles Food Bank, 632 N. Oakridge Dr. Port Angeles, WA 98362	Clallam	83
Spokane Focus Group	5/31/2023	1502 N Monroe St, Spokane, WA. 99201	Spokane	24
Oak Harbor Listening Session	6/1/2023	Oak Harbor Library, 1000 S.E. Regatta Drive, Oak Harbor, WA 98277	Island	7
Lynnwood Library Tabling Event	6/1/2023	Lynnwood Library, 19200 44th Ave W, Lynnwood, WA 98036	Snohomish	21
Tacoma Focus Group	6/2/2023	714 South 27th Street Tacoma, WA 98409	Pierce	5
Interview - Department of Corrections	6/2/2023	Virtual	All	3
Interview - Washington Public Utility Districts Association	6/2/2023	Virtual	All	4
Virtual Listening Session #1	6/7/2023	Virtual	All	5

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Meeting with Washington Urban League	6/8/2023	Virtual	King	2
Virtual Listening Session #2 (Workforce & Education Focused)	6/8/2023	Virtual	All	97
Virtual Listening Session #3	6/9/2023	Virtual	All	52
Walla Walla Focus Group	6/15/2023	209 E. Birch St, Walla Walla, WA 99362	Walla Walla	19
White Salmon Focus Group	6/21/2023	Pioneer Center; 501 NE Washington St; White Salmon, WA 98672	Klickitat	9
Interview with Reentry Council	6/26/2023	Virtual	All	2
Interview with Ziply	6/26/2023	Virtual	All	2
Tribal Listening Session #1	6/26/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	12
Interview with Washington Independent Telecommunications Association (WITA)	6/27/2023	Virtual	All	1
Interview with Comcast	6/27/2023	Virtual	All	3
Interview with Charter	6/28/2023	Virtual	All	1
Tribal Listening Session #2	6/28/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	14
Tribal Listening Session #3	6/29/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	8
Interview with Lumen	6/30/2023	Virtual	All	1
Clallam County BAT Meeting	7/5/2023	Virtual	Clallam	15

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Interview with Department of Children, Youth & Families	7/7/2023	Virtual	All	1
Focus Group with Formerly Incarcerated Individuals	7/10/2023	Ezell's Famous Chicken, 1902 M.L.K. Jr Way, Tacoma, WA 98405	King	5
Interview with Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF)	7/11/2023	Virtual	All	1
IFA Monthly Webinar	7/26/2023	Virtual	All	160
CCT/OK CO BAT Meeting	7/27/2023	Virtual	Okanogan	15
Public/Private Internet Service Provider Survey	7/28/2023	Virtual	All	33
Focus Group with Individuals with Disabilities	7/28/2023	The Lighthouse for the Blind, 2501 S Plum St, Seattle, WA 98144	King	5
Lewis County BAT Meeting	8/2/2023	Virtual	Lewis	26
Clallam County BAT Meeting	8/2/2023	Virtual	Clallam	22
Consultation with Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and Spokane Tribe of Indians	8/8/2023	Center for Native American Health and Wellness, WSU-Spokane Campus	Tribal Engagement	8
Meeting with Independent Living Providers for DCYF	8/9/2023	Virtual	All	2

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
SWISS (Snohomish, Whatcom, Island, Skagit, San Juan) Planning Meeting	8/11/2023	Virtual	Island San Juan Skagit Snohomish Whatcom	30
Meeting with Recovery Career Services	8/14/2023	Virtual	King	1
Consultation with Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Lummi Nation, Makah Tribe, Nisqually Indian Tribe, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Quinault Indian Nation, Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation	8/15/2023	Indian Summer Golf and Country Club, 5900 Troon Ln SE, Olympia, WA	Tribal Engagement	21
IFA Monthly Webinar	8/23/2023	Virtual	All	130
Informal Meeting with Cowlitz Indian Tribe and Lummi Nation	8/31/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	11
TVW Washington Presentation (Washington's Public Affairs Network)	9/11/2023	Virtual	All	100
Consultation with Hoh Indian Tribe	9/12/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	6
ATNI Conference	9/17/2023	20500 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	100

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
ATNI Conference	9/18/2023	20500 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	100
Consultation with Hoh Indian Tribe, Makah Tribe, and Quileute Tribe	9/18/2023	20502 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	6
ATNI Conference	9/19/2023	20501 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	100
Consultation with Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe	9/19/2023	20502 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	2
Consultation with Quinault Indian Nation	9/19/2023	20502 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	2
Informal Meeting with Samish Indian Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Makah Tribe, Cowlitz Indian Nation, and Tribal Ready Representative	9/19/2023	20503 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	5
ATNI Conference	9/20/2023	20502 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	100
Consultation with Lummi Nation, Nisqually Indian Tribe, and Samish Indian Nation	9/20/2023	20503 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	8
Workforce Readiness Meeting with Employment Security Department	9/20/2023	Virtual	All	3

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Workforce Readiness Meeting with Workforce Training Board and Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County	9/20/2023	Virtual	King	2
ATNI Conference	9/21/2023	20502 Old Highway 99 SW, Centralia WA 98531	Tribal Engagement	100
Open House for Public Comment - DE Plan	09/26/23	Southridge Sports and Events Complex, 2901 Southridge Blvd, Kennewick, WA 99338	Benton	11
Open House for Public Comment - DE Plan	09/27/23	Burlington Library, 820 E Washington Ave, Burlington, WA 98233	Skagit	7
Open House for Public Comment - DE Plan	09/28/23	Seattle Central Library	King	13
Informal Meeting with Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Hoh Indian Tribe, Quileute Tribe, Samish Indian Nation, and Spokane Tribe of Indians	9/28/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	12
Digital Equity Forum Meeting	10/5/2023	Virtual	All	40
Focus Group at Seattle Housing Authority	10/10/23	Westwood Heights Apartment, 9455 27th Ave SW, 98126)	King	31

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Digital Equity Forum Meeting	10/19/2023	Virtual	All	40
Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council (IACC) Conference	10/24/2023	Wenatchee Convention Center, 121 N Wenatchee Ave, Wenatchee, WA 98801	All	100
IACC Conference	10/25/2023	Wenatchee Convention Center, 121 N Wenatchee Ave, Wenatchee, WA 98802	All	100
IACC Conference	10/26/2023	Wenatchee Convention Center, 121 N Wenatchee Ave, Wenatchee, WA 98803	All	100
IACC Conference	10/27/2023	Wenatchee Convention Center, 121 N Wenatchee Ave, Wenatchee, WA 98804	All	100
Informal Meeting with Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Hoh Indian Tribe, Samish Indian Nation, and Spokane Tribe of Indians	10/28/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	7
Centennial Accord	10/30/23	Lucky Eagle Casino Event Center, 12888 188th Ave SW, Rochester, WA 98579	Tribal Engagement	200

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Meeting with Earl Overstreet from Washington Roundtable	10/31/23	Virtual	All	1
Lewis County BAT	11/01/23	Virtual	Lewis	20
WSAC Broadband Advisory Group	11/02/23	Virtual	All	30
National Guard and BEAD Meeting	11/02/23	Virtual	All	3
Meeting with Rep Drew Hansen	11/03/23	Virtual	Skagit	2
Meeting with Public Broadband Stakeholder Group	11/06/23	Virtual	All	50
WSBO & Breaking Point Solutions – Whitman County	11/08/23	Virtual	Whitman	--
WSBO & Breaking Point Solutions – Rainier Connect	11/08/23	Virtual	Pierce	13
WSBO & Breaking Point Solutions – Adams Co	11/08/23	Virtual	Adams	12
Stevens County/Spokane Tribe BAT Meeting	11/09/23	Virtual	Stevens	15
Island County Virtual Town Hall - BEAD/DE	11/09/23	Virtual	Island	--
WSAC - County Leaders Conference	11/14/23	The Davenport Grand, 333 W Spokane Falls Blvd, Spokane, WA 99201	All	--
Lincoln County and Lincoln County Economic Development Council Match Funding Meeting	11/14/23	Virtual	Lincoln	--

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Washington Workforce Association (WWA) Conference	11/15/23	Marriott Tacoma Downtown, 1538 Commerce St, Tacoma, WA 98402	All	500
WSAC - County Leaders Conference	11/15/23	The Davenport Grand, 333 W Spokane Falls Blvd, Spokane, WA 99201	All	--
WWA Conference	11/15/23	Marriott Tacoma Downtown, 1538 Commerce St, Tacoma, WA 98402	All	500
Asotin County BAT Meeting	11/15/23	Virtual	Asotin	--
WSAC - County Leaders Conference	11/16/23	The Davenport Grand, 333 W Spokane Falls Blvd, Spokane, WA 99201	All	--
Digital Equity Forum Meeting	11/16/23	Virtual	All	40
Digital Equity Small Group Meeting	11/16/23	Virtual	All	--
WSAC Meeting	11/17/23	Spokane, WA	All	--
Spokane County BAT Meeting	11/17/23	Virtual	Spokane	15
Meeting with Public Broadband Stakeholder Group	11/20/23	Virtual	All	--
Presentation to Senior Lobby	11/20/23	Virtual	All	--
Western States Broadband Alliance Monthly Meeting	11/21/23	Virtual	All	--

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Broadband Working Group	11/22/23	Virtual	All	--
IFA Monthly Webinar	11/29/23	Virtual	All	172
Informal Meeting with Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Lummi Nation, Nisqually Indian Tribe, and Spokane Tribe of Indians	11/30/2023	Virtual	Tribal Engagement	--
Clark County BAT Meeting	12/04/23	Virtual	Clark	10
WSBO Committee Presentation House Innovation Community Economic Development & Veterans Committee	12/05/23	Virtual	All	--
Pole Attachment Discussion	12/8/2023	Virtual	All	38
Stevens County/Spokane Tribe BAT Meeting	12/14/2023	Virtual	Stevens	9
Association of Washington Cities BEAD/DE Update	12/18/2023	Virtual	All	5
Broadband Consultation Discussion	12/27/2023	Virtual	All	2
Interview with Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs	1/12/2024	Virtual	All	2
Interview with Washington State Library	1/18/2024	Virtual	All	18
Spokane County BAT Meeting	1/19/2024	Virtual	Spokane	2

Engagement Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Location	Target Audience County	# Engaged
Interview with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	1/19/2024	Virtual	All	3
Interview with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)	1/19/2024	Virtual	All	1
Interview with Washington State Association of Senior Centers	1/22/2024	Virtual	All	1
Interview with Cindy Aden	1/22/2024	Virtual	All	2
Interview with Department of Corrections	1/23/2024	Virtual	All	150
IFA Monthly Webinar	1/24/2024	Virtual	All	1
Interview with DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division	1/25/2024	Virtual	All	1
Interview with Commerce (Housing Unit)	1/25/2024	Virtual	All	1

7.7 *Library Data*

Washington State Digital Equity Plan: Library Data Points

Provided by the Washington State Library, Office of the Secretary of State

PUBLIC LIBRARIES OPERATING IN RURAL OR MOSTLY RURAL AREAS

Washington state's 60 public library systems have 348 branch building locations, the majority of which are in rural areas. (This does not include 24 bookmobiles owned by nine systems, many of which visit rural and otherwise underserved areas.) Every county in the state has at least one public library branch building.[322]

Within the state's boundaries are also approximately 30 tribal library branches, more than three quarters of which are in rural areas. (*This figure does not include public library branches operated in cooperation with tribal communities based on the State Library's directory.)*

TARGET POPULATIONS SERVED BY WASHINGTON STATE LIBRARY DIVISIONS

The **State Library's Institutional Library Services Division** provides libraries or loans of library materials to incarcerated people at all of the state's adult facilities, and at Echo Glen Children's Center. The average number of incarcerated adults at the state's prisons was 12,854 as of Dec. 31, 2023.[323] Echo Glen Children's Center averages about 95 patrons at any one time (*ILS*).

The **State Library's Washington Talking Book and Braille Library** serves patrons statewide who are blind or have low vision. In 2023, it had 7,516 active users who borrowed or downloaded a book or magazine.

LIBRARIES' WI-FI, DEVICE SUPPORT

All 60 public library systems statewide provide free public Wi-Fi in their branches, which sometimes extends to the parking lot. Wi-Fi was used at these location more than 8 million times in 2022. Public libraries also provided nearly 6,000 free public computers that patrons used more than 2 million times in 2022 based on the *Public Libraries Survey*.

LIBTECH CONSORTIUM

The State Library recently launched the Washington State Library Technology Consortium (LibTech) consortium to bring modern IT services to small and rural libraries around the state. Using funds from the America Rescue Plan Act via the Institute of Museum and Library Services, discounts from the federal E-Rate program, and federal grants, the State Library created LibTech to upgrade library technology around the state, starting with library IT infrastructure. LibTech offers centralized managed services for firewalls, routing, switching, and access points, allowing for greater broadband into the library, while laying the groundwork for services such as cybersecurity, helpdesk support, printing, VOIP, and much more. This centralized support service provides technical help at a cheaper rate and significantly higher quality than libraries would be

[322] Note: Rural was defined using the Digital Equity NOFO definition of a rural area is one that is not a city or town with a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants, or an urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Information pulled from 2022 Public Libraries Survey, administered by the Washington State Library.

[323] Note: Please view the Washington Department of Corrections fact sheet, which also includes some gender, age and demographic information about these patrons.

able to achieve on their own, enabling libraries to provide a greater extent of traditional library services, modern digital services, and digital equity help to the local community in a secure and healthy technology model. There are currently 19 participating libraries around the state.

HOTSPOTS, WI-FI

During the pandemic, tribal and state libraries used hundreds of thousands of dollars in federal relief funding (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security; American Rescue Plan Act; Emergency Connectivity Fund) to purchase more than 1,000 mobile hotspots and internet service plans that patrons use to get online. At the height of the pandemic, four public library systems also used $91,680 in Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security funding to expand public Wi-Fi into their parking lots at 84 branch buildings. A partial list of these libraries follows.

Table 41: Partial list of libraries with public Wi-Fi in parking lots

Libraries that Expanded Public Wi-Fi with Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Funding
ANACORTES PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASOTIN COUNTY LIBRARY
BELLINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY
BURLINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
CAMAS PUBLIC LIBRARY
CATHLAMET PUBLIC LIBRARY
CENTRAL SKAGIT SEDRO-WOOLLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY
COLUMBIA COUNTY RURAL LIBRARY DISTRICT
EAST ADAMS LIBRARY DISTRICT
EVERETT PUBLIC LIBRARY
FORT VANCOUVER REGIONAL LIBRARY DISTRICT
HOH TRIBE
JEFFERSON COUNTY RURAL LIBRARY DISTRICT
KALAMA PUBLIC LIBRARY
KALISPEL TRIBE OF INDIANS

Libraries that Expanded Public Wi-Fi with Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Funding
KING COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM
LONGVIEW PUBLIC LIBRARY
LOPEZ ISLAND LIBRARY DISTRICT
MOUNT VERNON CITY LIBRARY
NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL LIBRARY
NORTH OLYMPIC LIBRARY SYSTEM
OCEAN SHORES PUBLIC LIBRARY
ORCAS ISLAND LIBRARY DISTRICT
PEND OREILLE COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT
PIERCE COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM
PORT TOWNSEND PUBLIC LIBRARY
PULLMAN (NEILL) PUBLIC LIBRARY
PUYALLUP PUBLIC LIBRARY
REARDAN MEMORIAL LIBRARY
RICHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY
SAN JUAN ISLAND LIBRARY DISTRICT
SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY
SNO-ISLE LIBRARIES
SPOKANE COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT
SPOKANE PUBLIC LIBRARY
SPRAGUE PUBLIC LIBRARY
STEVENS COUNTY RURAL LIBRARY DISTRICT

Libraries that Expanded Public Wi-Fi with Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Funding
SUQUAMISH INDIAN TRIBE
UPPER SKAGIT LIBRARY DISTRICT
WALLA WALLA COUNTY RURAL LIBRARY DISTRICT
WALLA WALLA PUBLIC LIBRARY
WHITMAN COUNTY LIBRARY
WILBUR (HESSELTINE) PUBLIC LIBRARY
YAKAMA NATION

7.8 WASHINGTON'S TRIBAL COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH PLAN

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

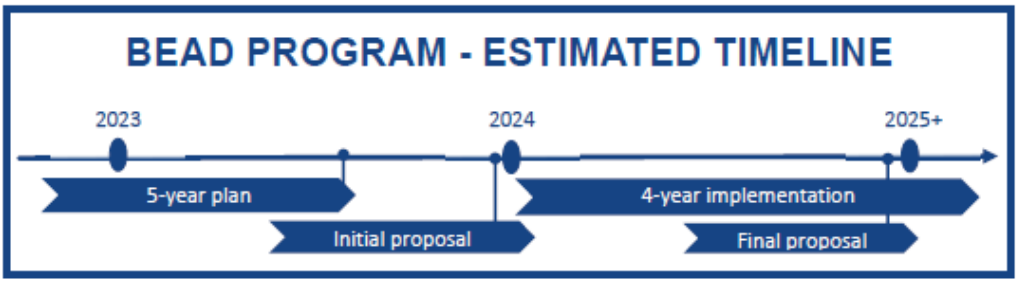
To confer with tribal governments at every step of the BEAD and Digital Equity planning process to ensure that tribes have numerous opportunities to provide input and feedback on the planning process, to shape what WSBO understands to be the unique needs of each tribal community/government, and any final 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

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7.9 *Public Comments*

The public comment period was for 60 days and ended on October 31, 2023. Fifty-six comments were submitted through an online form, nine were emailed, and seven were shared by teams comprised of Digital Equity Forum members. Note: Many of the comments were submitted by organizations or groups of individuals and a "single" comment could include multiple embedded themes. The local coordination tracker submitted to the NTIA contains public comments received and actions taken in response to public comments. Some of the themes from public comments included:

- a desire to increase outreach and awareness of resources,
- the need to improve access to digital devices, digital literacy classes, and support for discounted internet plan enrollment,
- affordability of reliable internet services, and
- how the digital equity plan can help increase overall internet availability.

A full public comment report, themes from public comments, and an overview of responses (January 24, 2024 Internet for All webinar) are available on the Internet for All website (www.commerce.wa.gov/internet-for-all/).