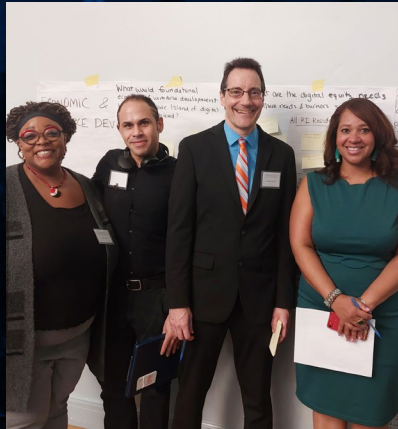
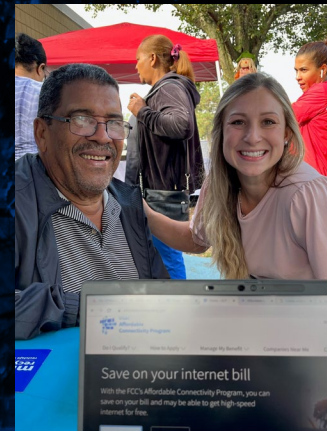




State of Rhode Island **DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN**

Draft for Public Comment | January 9, 2024



RHODE ISLAND
COMMERCE

CONNECTRI
FAST & AFFORDABLE INTERNET FOR ALL

Table of Contents

Letter from the Director	4
1. Executive Summary	5
Digital Equity and Rhode Island	6
Summary of Needs	7
Implementation Strategy	8
2. Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity	10
2.1 Vision for Digital Equity	11
2.2 Objectives and Strategies	12
2.3 State Priorities and Outcomes	18
3. Current State of Digital Equity: Barriers and Assets	22
3.1 Asset Inventory	24
3.2 Needs Assessment	36
4. Stakeholder Engagement	66
4.1 Stakeholder Engagement for Plan Development	66
4.2 Key Partners	67
4.3 Methods of Engagement	69
4.4 Ongoing Engagement	73
5. Implementation	75
5.1 Implementation Strategy and Key Activities	75
5.2 Timeline	88
6. Conclusion	91
7. Appendices	92
Appendix A: Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey Organizational Respondents	93
Appendix B: List of Organizations Engaged Through Meetings and Events	96
Appendix C: Survey Instruments	99
Appendix D: Event Collateral	118

“No family in our state should worry about choosing between paying a broadband bill and paying rent or buying groceries.”

- GOVERNOR DAN MCKEE

“In order to expand opportunity, we need to ensure that all Rhode Islanders have access to high-speed, reliable, affordable broadband service.”

- SENATOR JACK REED

“The internet isn’t a luxury anymore. It’s a necessity. You can’t apply for a job if you’re not online. You can’t do your homework, you can’t see the doctor, you can’t pay your bills... If you don’t have access to internet at a price you can afford, you’re going to get left behind.”

- U.S. COMMERCE SECRETARY AND FORMER RHODE ISLAND GOVERNOR GINA RAIMONDO



An affordable, reliable, high-speed internet connection is no longer a luxury, but a necessity.

It enables economic growth; access to education, employment, and healthcare; access to news and entertainment; and connection to family and friends. It is essential for full societal participation. Yet far too many Rhode Islanders can't afford high-speed service or don't have the digital literacy or devices needed to fully leverage this utility. Broadband networks are essential infrastructure of the 21st century. That infrastructure must be deployed equitably, and, moreover, individuals must have the skills and devices to use it.

Understanding this new normal, Rhode Island is receiving record levels of funding through the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)—including the Digital Equity Act (DEA) as well as the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) programs—to support equitable broadband infrastructure deployment and digital equity. These funds are to be invested based on participatory planning; the input of Rhode Islanders is integral to accomplishing our goals for digital equity. As such, the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation's ("Corporation") current draft of our state's Digital Equity Plan reflects the invaluable input of hundreds of residents.

And outreach and engagement efforts continue: Public comment on this draft will be accepted for 30 days from January 9 until February 8. Please submit your feedback at [CommerceRI.com/broadband](https://commerceri.com/broadband) during the public comment period.

We must ensure that investment in digital equity efforts produces wholistic results—including widespread digital literacy and access to necessary devices as well as affordable, reliable, fast connectivity. We must also ensure that the investment is done effectively, efficiently, and sustainably to meet the needs of Rhode Islanders today and position our state to be competitive into the future. That means thinking wholistically about structures of digital support for communities across the state.

The Corporation will update our draft plan based on feedback we receive and submit it for approval by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Once approved by NTIA, this plan will unlock federal funding specifically to support digital equity as part of the Corporation's efforts to ensure **all Rhode Islanders** have access to affordable, high-speed internet in their homes, at their places of employment, and in public facilities.

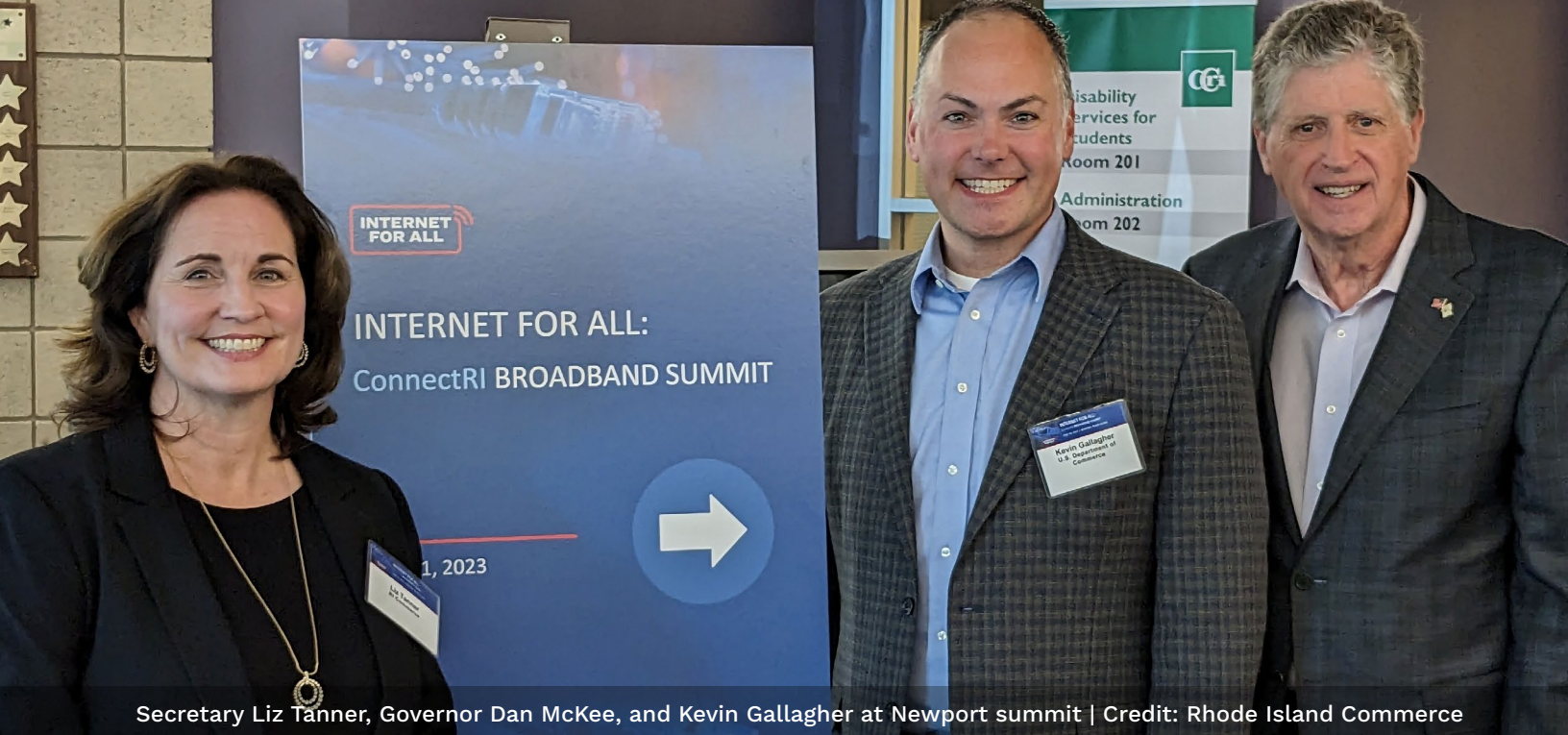
You can learn more about our digital equity initiatives and all the Corporation's planning and upcoming infrastructure efforts at: <https://commerceri.com/broadband>.

Working toward digital equity together,



Brian Thorn
Director of Broadband Strategy
Rhode Island Commerce Corporation





Secretary Liz Tanner, Governor Dan McKee, and Kevin Gallagher at Newport summit | Credit: Rhode Island Commerce

1

Executive Summary

Rhode Island’s overarching vision and goal for statewide broadband and digital equity is to leverage a best-in-class, resilient, sustainable, and scalable broadband infrastructure to propel the state’s 21st century economic, education, healthcare, civic and social engagement, and quality of life, by ensuring **all Rhode Islanders** have access to affordable, accessible high-speed internet in their homes, at their places of employment, and at public facilities by 2027.

The Corporation recognizes that the issues the BEAD and DEA programs seek to resolve are interconnected, and therefore the success of each program is dependent on the success of the other—broadband infrastructure must be accompanied by digital equity activities, and a core component of digital equity is the deployment of affordable broadband services. The state’s Digital Equity Plan encompasses both components and aligns to Rhode Island’s BEAD Initial Proposal to ensure our statewide broadband and digital equity vision is achieved.

DIGITAL EQUITY AND RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island has five counties and 39 municipalities—representing rural, suburban, and urban communities—

all within 1,214 square miles. The state’s population of 1.1 million is increasingly diverse; in Providence, the state’s capital and most populous city, 66% of residents affiliate as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC).¹ Rhode Island also has an aging population, with **1 in 4 Rhode Islanders** expected to be 65 years or older by 2030.² Further, 14% of Rhode Islanders report having a disability. Collectively, 71% of Rhode Islanders belong to at least one of the Digital Equity Act’s eight Covered Populations. Rhode Island’s Digital Equity Plan seeks to a) leverage the state’s small geographic size and density, b) support the state’s population diversity, and c) capitalize on the regionally based and deep community infrastructure to foster an inclusive digital advancement ecosystem.

Digital Equity Act Covered Populations

<p>Individuals in covered households (income at or below 150% of the federal poverty level)</p>	<p>Aging individuals (60 and above)</p>	<p>Incarcerated individuals (other than those incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility)</p>	<p>Veterans</p>
<p>Individuals with disabilities</p>	<p>Individuals with a language barrier (including those who are English learners; and have low levels of literacy)</p>	<p>Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group</p>	<p>Individuals who reside in a rural area</p>

¹ 2022 Housing Fact Book: <https://health.ri.gov/publications/databooks/HealthyHousing.pdf>

² Rhode Island Office of Aging: <https://oha.ri.gov/who-we-are/key-facts>

STRATEGIES AND APPROACH

The 2023 Rhode Island Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan sets the following principles for thoughtful stakeholder and community engagement:

- Meet communities where they are
- Enable participatory planning
- Cultivate strong implementation partnerships

Based on these principles, the Corporation developed a coordinated broadband and digital equity stakeholder engagement strategy that addresses both DEA and BEAD requirements. The Corporation categorizes stakeholders into four categories: government institutions, community organizations, private sector entities, and the broader public. The Corporation has prioritized engagement with unserved, underserved, and Covered Population residents in its planning process.

In support of this ongoing public feedback, the Corporation has additionally implemented a new Digital Equity Public Survey to further assess the State's baseline for each of the five Measurable Objective categories defined by the NTIA, as well as further understand major barriers to digital equity in the state. This [Digital Equity Public Survey*](#) data will continue to be integrated into our needs assessment as responses are received and analyzed.

SUMMARY OF ASSETS

The Corporation has created a Digital Equity Ecosystem Map, which gathers its information through an accompanying [Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey](#). With its limited geographic size, Rhode Island's

statewide assets have significant reach and impact. Rhode Island has a robust network of libraries, workforce development programs, adult education programs, social service and nonprofit organizations, and Health Equity Zones (HEZs) to develop and implement digital equity strategies. State agencies are also deeply interconnected into this work and all these efforts.

SUMMARY OF NEEDS

The process undertaken to inform this plan, supported by quantitative and qualitative data, revealed the connectivity needs of Rhode Islanders. Specific categories include:

- **Affordability:** Cost is a significant barrier; strategies to improve digital equity must include a pathway of reducing the cost burden on residents.
- **Device Access:** Only 80% of Rhode Island households have a desktop or laptop; Covered Populations are less likely to have a device and much more likely to be reliant on phones as their sole device.³
- **Digital skill building and online safety:** Rhode Islanders need the skills and support to utilize technology effectively—as well as to safely and securely improve their quality of life, access economic opportunities, and achieve their goals.
- **Online Accessibility of public resources:** Rhode Islanders need an ease of navigation of government processes and resources online.

This plan incorporates an understanding of these assets and needs and leverages this understanding to inform

*survey closes January 19th, 2024

³ ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.

the implementation strategy to achieve digital equity throughout the state.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

In anticipation of the federal State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), the Corporation is identifying key strategies to address Rhode Island's digital equity needs. The Corporation has identified strategies and activities that align with State's vision for equity and prosperity for all State residents (Rhode Island 2030) and the Governor's Learn365 Initiative, which is targeted toward K-12 students. Our final implementation strategy will be refined based upon the funding award and its requirements.

The Corporation is grateful for the input and participation of organizations and community members during this planning process. This Digital Equity Plan provides a blueprint to address the state's digital equity gaps and needs. The Corporation looks forward to working with Rhode Islanders to implement this plan and achieve digital equity in the Ocean State.



Strategy 1

Create and align opportunities for Rhode Islanders to obtain the digital skills necessary to achieve our state's priorities.

Strategy 2

Increase access to affordable, high-quality, large-screen, internet-enabled devices and technical support for those devices that meets residents' needs.

Strategy 3

Build partnerships and coordinate funding for affordable, high-quality broadband service for Covered Populations.

Strategy 4

Leverage digital equity ecosystem to support Rhode Island's Ongoing Digital Government Initiatives.

Strategy 5

Plan for long-term sustainability and continuity of services.

“It’s justice. Give people a chance to have access to everything they need to be able to do **everything** on their own.”

– statewide workshop participant





Funding announcement at Donovan Manor in Newport, RI | Credit: Kate Felder, RICC

2

Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity

The Corporation’s process for developing this draft included the following methods of engagement to share information and receive input:

- **Events and Listening Sessions:** The Corporation has hosted multiple events and listening sessions to provide bidirectional engagement with stakeholders and the broader public on digital equity and broadband planning. Over 40 Listening Sessions have been held in 2023 working with community groups to target Covered Populations and those who serve them. Large events such as a June 2023 Broadband
- **Digital Equity Working Group:** This multistakeholder group continues to provide input and guidance to the Corporation and helps to develop targeted strategies to address digital equity in Rhode Island. The group meets every two weeks to plan events, discuss findings, and to support each other’s work.
- **Surveys:** The Corporation requested input from all Rhode

Summit and statewide workshops were held to inform stakeholders of the state’s broadband and digital equity initiative and spark discussion on digital equity needs, assets, and potential solutions.

Island government agencies, nonprofits, experts, practitioners, funders, researchers, community organizers, and community members with over 1,000 responses across 3 surveys.

- **Public Comment:** To ensure that stakeholders and residents from all groups can provide comments, input, and feedback on the Digital Equity Plan, the Corporation is soliciting public comments during an open 30-day period from January 9 to February 8, 2024.

More information on this stakeholder engagement process can be found in [Chapter 4](#).

2.1 VISION FOR DIGITAL EQUITY

Rhode Island’s overarching vision and goal for statewide broadband and digital equity is to leverage a best-in-class, resilient, sustainable, and scalable broadband infrastructure to propel the state’s 21st century economic, education, healthcare, civic and social engagement, and quality of life, by ensuring **all Rhode Islanders** have access to affordable,

accessible high-speed internet in their homes, at their places of employment, and at public facilities by 2027.

This vision is shared across Rhode Island’s ConnectRI initiative, which includes the Corporation established to develop and manage the State’s Digital Equity Plan, BEAD program, and investments funded through the Capital Projects Fund (CPF). These programs are complementary, with BEAD and CPF funding being largely leveraged for expanding robust, affordable broadband services, while DEA funding generally covers the social components to ensure digital resources are accessible and inclusive to all. The Corporation will strategically combine and coordinate the use of the State’s Digital Equity Capacity Grant, BEAD allocation, and other funding sources to achieve this vision and its objectives for digital equity. The Corporation recognizes that the issues that the BEAD and DEA programs seek to resolve are interconnected, and therefore the success of either program is dependent on the success of the other—broadband infrastructure must be accompanied by digital equity activities,



Rhode Island library partners in Newport, RI | Credit: Kate Felder, RICC

Digital Equity Act Measurable Objective Categories

- ✓ Broadband availability and affordability
- ✓ Access to devices and technical support
- ✓ Digital literacy
- ✓ Online privacy and cybersecurity
- ✓ Online accessibility and inclusivity of government resources

and digital equity must include affordable broadband deployment.

In this spirit, the Rhode Island Digital Equity Plan establishes a complementary set of goals and strategies for digital inclusion and equity, designed to align with the DEA's Measurable Objectives categories, the elements of digital equity that states are required to document and promote among each Covered Population.

As the State's Administering Entity for both BEAD and DEA programs, the Corporation will ensure the coordinated deployment of all federal funding sources to achieve these goals and strategies. Rhode Island's Digital Equity Capacity Grant will fund the Implementation Strategy activities outlined in this plan.

2.2 OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Governor McKee's [Rhode Island 2030](#) (RI 2030) charts the state's vision for equity and prosperity for all state residents, with metrics for a healthy and vibrant Rhode Island.⁴ In alignment with this broad plan, in July 2022, the Corporation released the draft RI Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan, which explained the state's digital divide. This plan, which was finalized in 2023, builds upon RI 2030 and informs the RI Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan—as well as aligns to the state's BEAD plan. It seeks to leverage the state's small geographic size, population diversity and density, and the regionally based community infrastructure to foster an inclusive digital advancement ecosystem.

⁴ Rhode Island 2030: <https://www.ri2030.com/>

Strategies, Objectives, and State Priorities

STRATEGY	OBJECTIVE	DIGITAL EQUITY ACT MEASURABLE OBJECTIVE CATEGORIES	STATE PRIORITIES
<p>Strategy 1: Create and align opportunities for Rhode Islanders to obtain the digital skills necessary to achieve our state’s priorities.</p>	<p>Objective 1: Digital Skills and Online Safety—ensure all Rhode Island Covered Populations have the skills and support needed to utilize technology effectively and safely to improve their quality of life, access economic opportunities, and achieve their goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Digital Literacy – Online Privacy and Cybersecurity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Economic and Workforce Development – Education – Health – Civic and Social Engagement – Delivery of Essential Services
<p>Strategy 2: Increase access to affordable, high-quality large-screen internet enabled devices and technical support that meets residents’ needs.</p>	<p>Objective 2: Device Access—prioritize Covered Populations to achieve a goal of 95% of Rhode Island residents owning an affordable, high-quality, large-screen, internet-enabled device that meets their needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Access to devices and technical support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Economic and Workforce Development – Education – Health – Civic and Social Engagement – Delivery of Essential Services
<p>Strategy 3: Build partnerships and coordinate funding for affordable high-quality broadband service for Covered Populations.</p>	<p>Objective 3: Broadband —provide universal access to affordable, reliable broadband service adoption gaps in Covered Population communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Broadband availability and affordability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Economic and Workforce Development – Education – Health – Civic and Social Engagement – Delivery of Essential Services
<p>Strategy 4: Leverage digital equity ecosystem to support Rhode Island’s Ongoing Digital Government Initiatives.</p>	<p>Objective 4: Online Accessibility—ensure essential public resources and services have online accessibility, language access, and usability for Covered Populations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online accessibility and inclusivity of government resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Economic and Workforce Development – Education – Health – Civic and Social Engagement – Delivery of Essential Services

Strategy 5: Plan for long-term sustainability and continuity of services

(Note: Strategy 5 is designed to underpin all other strategies and support the long-term achievement of all objectives and state priorities.)

Rhode Island’s Digital Equity Objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The Corporation developed the Digital Equity Objectives and KPIs below to measure success towards achieving its vision of digital equity in the state. These objectives are designed to align with the DEA’s five Measurable Objectives categories.

The baseline measures are from the NTIA Internet Use Survey (2021),

American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates, and Federal Communication Commission’s (FCC) National Broadband Map (NBM); more information on baseline measures can be found in [Chapter 3](#). Additional baseline measures will be established through Rhode Island’s ongoing [Digital Equity Public Survey](#).*

The Corporation plans to track KPIs through a combination of programmatic reporting from partners and monitoring indicators in other data sources such as ACS and NBM.

Objective 1: Digital Skills and Online Safety—ensure all Rhode Island Covered Populations have the skills and support needed to utilize technology effectively and safely to improve their quality of life, access economic opportunities, and achieve their goals.

Baseline⁵

- 55% of Rhode Island’s internet users communicate with a doctor online.
 - 23% of Rhode Island’s internet users telecommute.
 - 22% of Rhode Island’s internet users participate in online classes or job training.
 - 22% of Rhode Island’s internet users have experienced an online security breach, identity theft, or similar crime.
 - Note: Additional baselines on digital skills and confidence are being established by the ongoing Digital Equity Public Survey.
-

KPIs

- Number of highest need Covered Population residents trained in digital skills programs for foundational skills.⁶
- Number of programs providing training on digital skills related to state priorities such as health, education, and workforce development.
- Number of training programs for online privacy and cybersecurity.

⁵ Source for all baseline measures for Objective 1: NTIA Internet Use Survey 2021. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.

⁶ Highest-need Covered Populations for digital skills will be identified through the ongoing Digital Equity Public Survey.

*closes January 19th, 2024

Objective 2: Device Access—prioritize Covered Populations to achieve a goal of 95% of Rhode Island residents owning an affordable, high-quality, large-screen, internet-enabled device that meets their needs.⁷

Baseline⁸

- 92% of Rhode Island households have a computing device, yet only 80% of Rhode Island households have a desktop or laptop.
 - 11% of residents have a smartphone as their only computing device.
 - Multiple Covered Populations have significantly lower rates of home computer access. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.
 - 41% of Adult Education learners lack a sufficient device for distance learning.⁹
-

KPIs

- Number of Covered Population-serving programs that provide devices and device technical support.
 - % of Covered Population residents who own a large-screen, internet-enabled device.
-

Objective 3: Broadband—provide universal access to affordable, reliable broadband service and close broadband adoption gaps in Covered Population communities.

Baseline

- 2,309 unserved and 586 underserved locations in Rhode Island as defined by the FCC’s NBM data.¹⁰
 - 78% of residents subscribe to broadband.¹¹
 - 15% of surveyed residents reported that broadband is affordable.¹²
 - Multiple Covered Populations have significantly lower home broadband subscription rates. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.
 - 46% of eligible residents are enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).¹³
-

KPIs

- Number of unserved and underserved locations connected to broadband (through BEAD).
 - Number of CAIs connected to gigabit internet (through BEAD).
 - Number of public and affordable housing properties and correctional facilities connected to broadband.
 - % of eligible residents enrolling in ACP or other affordable broadband benefit.
 - Number of ISPs providing low-cost service plans.
-

7 95% represents a goal of near-universal device ownership and the closing of device gaps among Covered Populations, while acknowledging that some households may still not opt to own a large-screen device despite the removal of barriers, such as affordability and accessibility.

8 Unless otherwise specified, source for all baseline measures for Objective 2: ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.

9 RI Department of Education (RIDE)’s survey of Adult Education students. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.

10 The Corporation plans to revise this baseline measure through a BEAD pre-challenge reclassification process and a follow-on challenge process. Please see Chapter 3.2 for more information.

11 ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.

12 RI Internet Connectivity Survey. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.

13 Education Superhighway Affordable Connectivity Program Enrollment Dashboard:
<https://www.educationsuperhighway.org/no-home-left-offline/acp-data/>

Objective 4: Online Accessibility—ensure essential public resources and services have online accessibility, language access, and usability for Covered Populations.

Baseline

- 39% of Rhode Island internet users access government services online.¹⁴
 - Note: Additional baseline for residents reporting that online government services are accessible is being established by new Digital Equity Public Survey.
-

KPIs

- Number of user-testing groups held with Covered Populations.
- Usability ratings for online public services among Covered Populations.
- % of state government websites meeting the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standard.



Educators and community partners in Rhode Island and Broadband Summit event | Credit: Kate Felder, RICC

¹⁴ NTIA Internet Use Survey 2021. See Chapter 3.2 for more information.

Rhode Island's Digital Equity Strategies

To achieve these objectives, the Corporation will lead the implementation of five strategies:

Strategy 1

Create and align opportunities for Rhode Islanders to obtain the digital skills necessary to achieve our state's priorities.

Strategy 2

Increase access to affordable, high-quality large-screen internet enabled devices and technical support that meets residents' needs.

Strategy 3

Build partnerships and coordinate funding for affordable, high-quality broadband service for Covered Populations.

Strategy 4

Leverage digital equity ecosystem to support Rhode Island's Ongoing Digital Government Initiatives.

Strategy 5

Plan for long-term sustainability and continuity of services.

More details on these strategies can be found in [Chapter 5](#).

2.3 STATE PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES

2.3.1 Economic and Workforce Development Outcomes

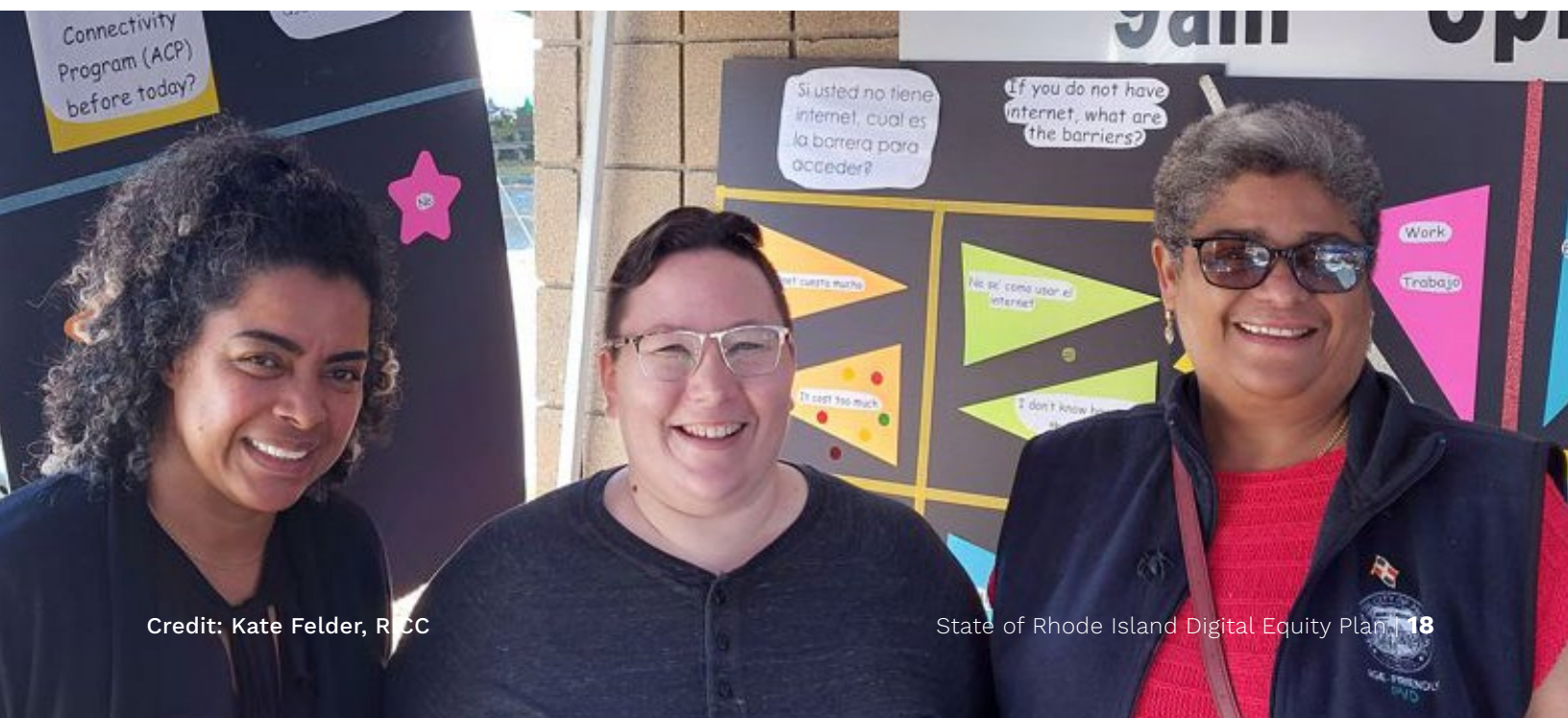
Digital skills, and the widespread availability, affordability, and adoption of broadband and related digital technologies, are critical elements of equitable and inclusive economic development. Throughout the digital equity planning process, stakeholders representing Covered Populations identified improved connectivity and digital skills as keys to getting better jobs and economic opportunities.

“Careers, not just a job. If we want to train folks for a career, we need to include all of these other pieces. The digital literacy skills are critical for taking that next step. It’s very challenging to make any movement from entry level jobs without the skills.”

- Statewide workshop participant

2.3.2 Educational Outcomes

Reaching our Digital Equity Objectives will have a major impact on the state’s educational outcomes by improving access to digital tools, services, and online and hybrid educational opportunities. Digital literacy and advanced digital skills are important elements to educating students for the economy and workforce of the future. Advancing digital equity can make education more accessible, help students find and apply for college and financial aid, make career and technical education for veterans and the formerly incarcerated more attainable, give immigrants in adult education programs more tools to learn English and job skills, and make mentoring available virtually. It can also support the state’s implementation of [Learn365RI](#), a program that seeks to expand the out-of-school programming available to school children in the state, through the integration of technology, online educational resources, and digital skill-building.



“All students would have **access to the same resources** from all the same places: home, school, community organizations.”

- Statewide workshop participant

2.3.3 Health Outcomes

Reaching our Digital Equity Objectives will have a major impact on the state’s health outcomes by improving access to telehealth (including behavioral health), reducing disparities in social determinants of health (including food security), and improving the findability of healthcare and health resources online. Additional impacts of telehealth may be reducing bias from healthcare providers (based on the patient’s physical appearance) and increasing the presence of providers in communities with provider shortages. For homebound individuals, especially aging individuals and those with disabilities, it has the potential to improve mental health by reducing social isolation. Digital equity will improve access to care and prescriptions for those without reliable transportation. Improved digital skills and awareness of online privacy, safety, and cybersecurity can promote healthy technology use among children and youth, also improving mental health.

“Telehealth will allow people to **utilize** their primary care provider more.”

- Statewide workshop participant

2.3.4 Civic and Social Engagement

Reaching our Digital Equity Objectives can help the state achieve greater civic and social engagement goals by improving communications and providing opportunities for online engagement in government and public meetings, and help residents feel more connected to their state and local officials. It can also increase overall participation in civic activities and increase awareness of community programs and resources, especially for those who have language or mobility barriers, such as individuals with a disability, rural residents, aging individuals, and low-income households. Improvements in digital skills and awareness of online safety can improve civic discourse and protect against the impacts of misinformation online.

“People could **register to vote online** to increase voter engagement.”

- Statewide workshop participant



Credit: Kate Felder, RICC

2.3.5 Delivery of Essential Services

Reaching our Digital Equity Objectives can help the state achieve RI 2030 goals and actions for the delivery of essential services, such as housing, childcare, infrastructure and transportation, and government benefits.

“One of my former students called me a week ago. She had an accident, and she wanted to apply for (temporary disability), but **she didn’t have a computer**. She also didn’t have transportation. If she had a computer or tablet, she could apply online for all these programs.”

- Statewide workshop participant

2.3.6 Integration of Municipal, Regional, and Tribal Digital Equity Plans

The Corporation is not aware of any current formal Municipal or Regional Digital Equity Plans in Rhode Island. Throughout this planning process, it has engaged and collaborated with municipalities statewide to ensure local digital equity barriers, assets, and priorities are reflected in the Rhode Island Digital Equity Plan.

The Corporation is also not aware of any current Tribal Digital Equity Plans. The Narragansett Indian Tribe has received a federal Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program grant for a Broadband Use and Adoption project, which proposes to “increase broadband services and access for Tribal members who reside on ancestral lands in Washington County,” and aims to “provide distance learning capabilities and strengthen digital literacy, improve broadband speeds and affordability of services for community members, and generate workforce development and job creation.”¹⁵ Through a Dear Tribal Leader Letter, the Corporation has invited the Narragansett Indian Tribe to a formal consultation on how leaders from the state and the Tribe can enhance collaboration in both broadband and digital equity initiatives for the Tribe. Following the public comment period of Rhode Island’s Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Initial Proposal, the Corporation is in contact with a representative of the Tribe to help coordinate this consultation.



Wangkun Jia City of Providence - Kennedy Plaza | Credit: Wangkun Jia

¹⁵ Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program: <https://www.internetforall.gov/funding-recipients/narragansett-indian-tribe>

Community Stories

Throughout the planning process, it was important for the ConnectRI team to engage with existing networks and ecosystems already doing great work at the intersection of state priorities and digital equity. An example is the inspiring and energizing day we had at the Central Providence Health Equity Zones Collaborative meeting! We shared resources, highlights and challenges from 2023, and our goals for 2024. While we all represent different groups, health equity is our goal.

Digital equity IS health equity. Digital equity means access to affordable high-speed internet and devices for everyone. It also means being able to have telehealth appointments when you can't get to the doctor. It means being able to access the bus schedule in real time. It means getting training/being able to apply for a new job. It means the ability to apply for social services. It means an end to social isolation. It means autonomy.



Credit: One Neighborhood Builders

Representatives from Building Futures | Apprenticeship RI, ONE Neighborhood Builders, Green & Healthy Homes Initiative, Clínica Esperanza/Hope Clinic, Women & Infants Hospital, Providence Preservation Society, THE RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION, CODAC Behavioral Healthcare (CODAC Inc.), DIRT PALACE PUBLIC PROJECTS, and Farm Fresh Rhode Island.



Credit: Kate Felder, RICC

3

Current State of Digital Equity: Barriers and Assets

Rhode Island has a population of over one million; 71% of residents are members of one or more of the eight Covered Populations.¹⁶ This chapter outlines the existing assets that can be expanded and enhanced to achieve digital equity for the state's Covered Populations and **all Rhode Islanders**.

¹⁶ Census Bureau's Digital Equity Act Population Viewer: https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c507_US_Ce_2b42

Table: Covered Populations in Rhode Island (Sorted by Population)⁷

	Population	%
Total Population	1,059,361	
Total Covered Population	750,500	70.8%
Racial or ethnic minority	309,333	29.2%
Aged 60 or over	264,840	25.0%
With a language barrier	216,110	20.4%
In covered households	179,032	16.9%
With a Disability	146,192	13.8%
Rural	119,708	11.3%
Veteran	49,790	4.7%
Incarcerated	2,119	0.2%



⁷ Census Bureau's Digital Equity Act Population Viewer: <https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c507> US Ce 2b42

3.1 ASSET INVENTORY

The Corporation’s Digital Equity Ecosystem Map identifies potential CAIs; the Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey¹⁷ collects detailed information from organizations on their services and targeted populations, which is compiled on the map. In combination with stakeholder research and engagement, the following digital equity asset themes have emerged:

- **Organization types:** The primary organizational types are libraries, municipalities, schools, community-based organizations; housing authorities and state government agencies also represent significant assets.
 - **Libraries:** There are 48 public library systems statewide, with coordination and support provided by the Office of Library & Information Services (OLIS) and Ocean State Libraries (OSL), in addition to school and specialized libraries.
 - **Postsecondary Education:** Three public higher education institutions, Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), Rhode Island College (RIC), and University of Rhode Island (URI), offer workforce development programs that could be partners for digital equity initiatives.
 - **Government Agencies:** The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) funds a network of providers to implement Adult Education, General Educational Development (GED), and Workforce Development programs. The Department of
- **Housing:** Housing organizations include public housing authorities, community development corporations (e.g. ONE Neighborhood Builders), and statewide organizations, including RI Housing and RI HUD.
- **Nonprofits and Community Based Organizations:** Rhode Island has a robust network of local organizations and chapters of national nonprofits that offer social services, advocacy, and connectivity to residents, with a focus on Covered Populations.
- **Digital equity programs and services offered:** The Asset Mapping Survey identifies 162 organizations providing computer and device access, including eight (8) library systems, six (6) community-based organizations (CBOs), five (5) municipalities, and local nonprofits and schools. Thirty (30) organizations—most frequently libraries, CBOs, schools, and municipalities—offer digital skills training. Twenty-one (21) organizations support broadband access and adoption. Housing

Labor and Training (DLT) also offers three Career Centers across the state in addition to funding a variety of workforce development and training programs, including the Real Jobs RI program. The Office of Postsecondary Commissioner manages and operates three workforce development centers located around the state.

¹⁷ To date, 116 organizations have completed the Digital Equity Mapping Survey. The Corporation will continue to collect survey responses with on-going Ecosystem map updates.

Is your organization listed?

If not, please fill complete our [Digital Equity Asset Mapping survey](#).

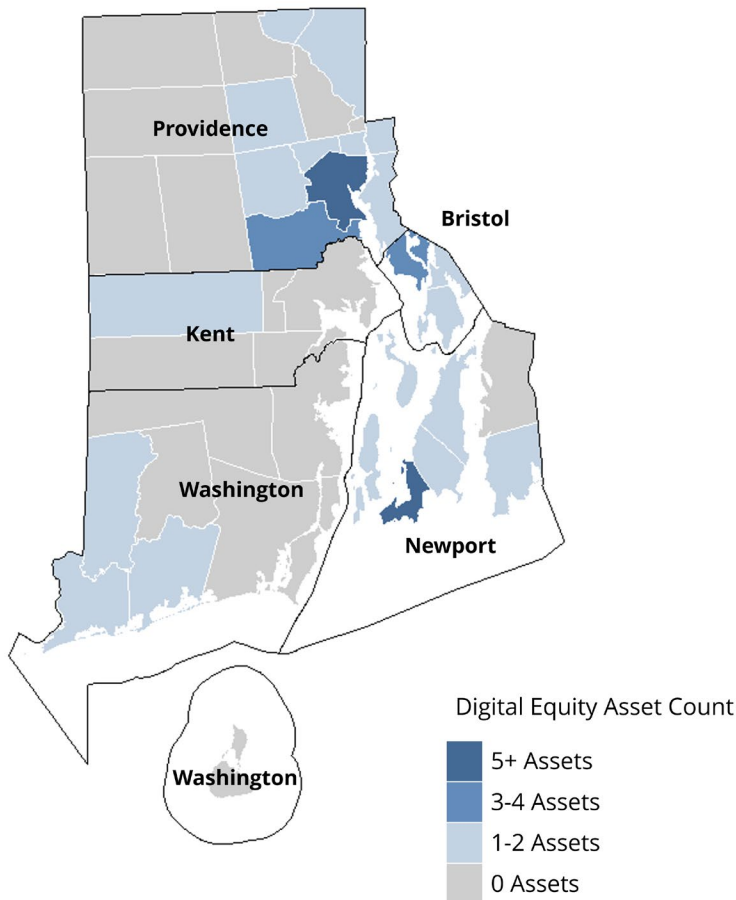
authorities and ISPs also connect residents to internet service.

- **Covered Populations served:** To date, Rhode Island’s digital equity efforts have most successfully reached covered households, aging individuals, individuals with a language barrier, and members of racial and ethnic minorities; veterans, individuals with disabilities, and incarcerated individuals are the least directly served.
- **Geographies served:** Rhode Island has five (5) counties; most existing digital equity efforts are provided by local public

library branches and municipal governments. Providence, Newport, and Bristol Counties have the most identified assets; Kent County has the fewest identified assets.

Rhode Island has a network of faith-based and community-based organizations, afterschool programs, philanthropy, healthcare systems, labor organizations, and private universities that could be engaged in digital equity. The representative organizations included in this section are non-exhaustive examples of the state’s key assets. The Corporation will continue to outreach to and engage more organizations for inclusion in this Asset Inventory.

Map 1: Local Assets Identified on the Digital Equity Asset Map



Source: Rhode Island Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey

SUMMARY OF RHODE ISLAND’S DIGITAL EQUITY ECOSYSTEM MAP

- Assets Represented
 - Libraries
 - Postsecondary Education
 - Government Agencies
 - Housing organizations
 - Nonprofits and Community-Based Organizations
 - Municipalities
- Services offered
 - 162 organizations providing computer and device access
 - 30 organizations offering digital skills training
 - 21 organizations supporting broadband access and adoption

EXAMPLES OF STATEWIDE ASSETS

With its limited geographic size, Rhode Island's statewide assets have significant reach and impact. Rhode Island has a robust network of libraries, workforce development programs, adult education programs, social service agencies, and Health Equity Zones (HEZs) to develop and implement digital equity strategies. Through its participatory planning process, the following statewide assets have been identified:

Adult Education at Community College Rhode Island (CCRI)

CCRI offers adult education (e.g. GED and ESL) and workforce training programs for high demand careers in health, technology, and computer/digital manufacturing. Device access is offered to students.

Ocean State Higher Education Economic Development and Administrative Network (OSHEAN)

OSHEAN delivers connectivity, networking, and cloud solutions to Community Anchor Institutions and the communities they serve. OSHEAN has an extensive member network consisting of healthcare organizations, colleges and universities, K-12 schools, libraries, government agencies, and other community organizations, and acts as a key strategic technology partner by facilitating member collaboration and providing technology solutions and services in support of its members' missions.

Rhode Island College (RIC)

The RIC Workforce Development Hub is an economic, educational, and health-centered engine for Central Falls and Blackstone Valley, bringing vital skills and training to its community, including ESL classes. Other services include Broadband Access and Affordability and Device Access.

Rhode Island Community Action Association

RICAA is a network of community action agencies (CAAs) serving all 39 cities and towns in Rhode Island. The member agencies have various missions and goals to end poverty, by continuously aiming to provide resources, support, services and programs to Rhode Island residents in need.

Rhode Island Department of Health - Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Initiative

Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH)'s HEZs provide place-based, collaborative, and community-led solutions to address social determinants of health. Fifteen (15) HEZs have been formed throughout the state. HEZ efforts have improved childhood health, increased access to healthy foods and food security, reduced loneliness, and supported chronic disease self-management.

Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS)

DHS works with community partners throughout Rhode Island to deliver critical benefits, supports, and services to more than 300,000 families, adults, children, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and veterans every year. Its [RI Works](#) program provides financial and employment assistance for eligible parents and families.

Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training (DLT)

RIDLDT provides a range of workforce development, employment services, educational opportunities, and income support to Rhode Islanders. DLT's programs and initiatives coordinate efforts between employers, training providers, and community-based organizations to upskill, support, and place workers, including DLT Career Centers, Real Jobs RI, Registered Apprenticeship, Back to Work RI and the Senior Community Service Employment Program.

Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA)

RIEMA runs a cybersecurity program based upon the **National Institute of Standards and Technology's** Framework for Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity in partnership with federal, state and local governmental agencies, the Rhode Island National Guard, law enforcement, academia, the business community and other critical infrastructure stakeholders.

Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns

RI League of Cities and Towns represents each of Rhode Island's thirty-nine (39) municipalities by providing legislative advocacy on shared municipal interests, timely information and research, regular trainings and workshops, and opportunities for local officials to collaborate with peers from across the state. Broadband availability and affordability are goals for this non-partisan advocacy and membership organization.

Rhode Island Libraries

Rhode Island's forty-eight (48) public library systems are supported by the **Office of Library & Information Services (OLIS)** and **Ocean State Libraries** network. Many public library systems have existing digital equity programs, including broadband access, device access, digital skills classes and technical support for devices.



Statewide digital equity workshop at Cranston Hall Library | Credit: HR&A Advisors

United Way of Rhode Island

United Way of Rhode Island funds organizations statewide to address the root causes of racial inequities faced by Rhode Island's BIPOC communities. United Way's 211 system serves as a critical referral service to community resources for Rhode Islanders, including job training, veteran's services, services for aging individuals and those with disabilities, and victims' services (including cybercrime and cyber bullying).

EXAMPLES OF ASSETS SERVING MULTIPLE COVERED POPULATIONS

Most assets in the Digital Equity Asset Map serve multiple Covered Populations. Only sixteen (16) organizations limited themselves to one Covered Population.

Blackstone Valley Community Action Program

BVCAP provides workforce and education programs, access to social services, and basic necessities to residents. Device access, digital skills and technical support are also provided.

- Aging Individuals
- Covered Households
- Individuals with Disabilities
- Individuals with Language Barriers
- Individuals who are Members of Racial or Ethnic Minorities

Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island

Dorcas offers adult education, language learning, job training, citizenship and immigration services, refugee resettlement, translation and interpreting, and other services to those seeking to overcome educational, cultural, economic, and language barriers. Provides Broadband access and device Access.

- Aging Individuals
- Covered Households
- Individuals with Language Barriers
- Individuals who are Members of Racial or Ethnic Minorities

Family Services of RI

Family Services of RI provides services for families and children across the state, including a "Hope" division that focuses on educational and family success. Offers digital skills training and technical support.

- Covered Households
- Individuals with Disabilities
- Individuals with Language Barriers
- Individuals who are Members of Racial or Ethnic Minorities
- Rural Residents

Genesis Center

Genesis Center offers education, job training and support services to people of diverse cultures so that they may achieve economic independence and participate fully in society. Provides a wide range of digital inclusion services, including digital skills and technical support, device access, and broadband access. Provides tools such as hotspots and computers for those who are not eligible for ACP.

- Aging Individuals
- Covered Households
- Individuals with Disabilities
- Individuals with Language Barriers
- Individuals who are Members of Racial or Ethnic Minorities
- Rural Residents
- Veterans



3.1.1 Broadband Adoption and Affordability Assets

Partially funded through a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ACP Outreach Grant, the Corporation has established a statewide outreach infrastructure to expand broadband adoption and affordability, which has helped increase ACP enrollment from 30% to 46% between February 2023 and December 2023. This effort involves partnering with local governments, public libraries, housing authorities, and the United Way of Rhode Island (including the Mobile 211 bus) to host ACP awareness and enrollment events. Additional outreach was conducted in English and Spanish by adult education providers, RIDE, and the state's HEZs, reaching underserved individuals and including those eligible for free and reduced lunch and heating assistance.

The Digital Equity Ecosystem Map includes twenty-one (21) assets which provide broadband adoption services among their offerings. Below are examples of assets focusing on broadband adoption and affordability.

EXAMPLES

Mobile Beacon

Mobile Beacon, a RI-based national company, works with nonprofits, schools, and CAIs to provide unlimited mobile service for as low as \$10 per month.

Newport Housing Authority (NHA)

NHA is expanding broadband access at all federally funded properties and offering provision of devices and digital skills trainings through partnerships with other entities. NHA received a \$980k CDBG grant to provide broadband to Newport Housing Authority properties (approx. 600 units). See Success Story on [page 29](#).

One Neighborhood Builders: ONE|NB Connects

ONE|NB built a free community Wi-Fi network currently covering two-thirds of all neighborhood residents in Olneyville, a Providence neighborhood with the lowest proportion of home internet service and among the highest rates of poverty.

Providence Housing Authority (PHA)

PHA established internet service in housing developments for residents to use in community rooms/spaces. PHA provides digital literacy education with devices for participants to use and keep.

Providence Public Library (PPL)

PPL provides Digital Navigation Services, technology classes, and tech-related workforce training, offering assistance for developing digital skills, in a culturally diverse, multilingual learning community. Includes classes, workshops, and one-on-one help. Special programs include Rhode Coders, a class on the fundamentals of web development coding, and Data Navigators, a class on data analysis and visualization.

3.1.2 Existing Digital Equity Plans

Funded through the National Governor’s Association, Skills for Rhode Island’s Future published ‘Recommendations for Digitally Equitable Rhode Island.’ We are also aware that several Health Equity Zones have created community-based strategic plans that include elements of digital equity; however, these are not specifically digital equity plans. There are no formal municipal or regional digital equity plans.

EXAMPLES

Connect Greater Newport Broadband Report

Connect Greater Newport, the economic development division of the Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce, published an analysis in January 2022 of broadband availability in Rhode Island. The analysis was conducted by Mission Broadband, Inc. and Reid Consulting Group LLC., with the following findings:

1. 42% of the populated square miles of RI remain unserved or underserved
2. small and medium sized businesses face broadband capacity constraints, which have adverse impact on their businesses
3. the lack of in-home internet is correlated with low household income levels
4. RI has available middle-mile fiber resources that can be leveraged to close last mile gaps.

Community Stories

Part of my story is where I was coming from. I'm a Newport Housing Authority resident, but before that, I was homeless and working on my sobriety. My life was changed significantly by getting sober. From there, I wanted to create a wellness center, but during the pandemic, I was looking around the neighborhood and seeing the kids next door and thinking about how they're going to keep up. Everyone was talking about the digital divide, and **I knew we needed to do something.**

We got in touch with the OSHEAN Network, another nonprofit, and chatted with them about what we could have over here. We also got in touch with Rhode Island Commerce, and they really understood the digital divide and the **need for equity.** They gave us advice and told us to write down what we wanted. We put together a plan with Rhonda Mitchell, Executive Director of Newport Housing Authority, to get broadband done for the entire housing authority, not just one section. My brother drew up the grant application, and we ended up getting money for it. Governor McKee came down here in January and announced a \$980,000 grant.

Now, **over 85% of our community is connected.** It happened quickly. We're seeing a push for medical services and education and just staying connected to family, the ability to get on Zoom calls easily, making a difference. The biggest thing is how much money people are saving, and that goes for me too. We're no longer left with choices like "Am I going to have something different to eat tonight?" in order to afford the bill.



I have a lot of people calling me and saying, "Thank you. This is really helping me out." It's awesome. In that sense, you're becoming part of the bigger community now. You're not part of the divide anymore. Now I have an iPad, and it's like now I get to speak the same language as everyone else. It's just these little things that can change people's outlook on where they live, who they are, what they can become. Who knows? It's limitless.

– Tommy Sheehan,
president of the Hi-Lo Neighborhood Association
and resident of Newport Housing Authority

Community Broadband for Aquidneck Island

Building upon the 2015 Tilson Report and 2022 Connect Greater Newport analysis, the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission is developing a business plan for a community-based broadband network that identifies the most realistic and cost-effective approach to providing high quality, affordable broadband throughout the community.

Warren Broadband Analysis

The Town of Warren partnered with HCH Enterprises to conduct an analysis of broadband availability. The findings show:

1. 63% of respondents lacked available, adequate broadband at 100/20 Mbps speeds.
2. Underserved populations place a higher priority on telehealth visits and experience increased latency, impacting virtual learning and remote work.

Tribal Plans and Programs

As discussed in [Chapter 2.3.6](#), the Narragansett Indian Tribe received a [Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program grant](#) for its Broadband Use and Adoption project, which will increase broadband services and access for Tribal members who reside on ancestral lands in Washington County, Rhode Island.

3.1.3 Digital Inclusion Assets by Covered Population

Most organizations who responded to the Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey serve more than one Covered Population. The sample of organizations highlighted below were selected based on their Covered Population-specific programs or services and relevance to digital equity. Please refer to Appendices A and B for the full list of organizations who have responded to the Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey or were engaged through meetings and events thus far. The Corporation will continue to update the Asset Inventory throughout the public comment period and during plan implementation. If your organization is not listed, please complete the [Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey](#).

Aging Individuals

Examples of these organizations include:

AARP Rhode Island

AARP provides volunteer-led online programming to improve health and wellness, including online yoga, tai-chi, gardening, and caregiving classes. Hosts trainings to help aging individuals learn to use new vehicle computer technology.

AHEPA Senior Living

AHEPA is a senior living apartment facility in Newport that provides broadband service to the building, and device and printer access in the main community room.

Cyber Seniors (URI)

Cyber Seniors connects senior community members with young adult mentors who deliver tech-training and support, skills certifications, device training, and custom webinars.

Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging (RIOHA)

RIOHA partners with various organizations throughout Rhode Island to connect aging Rhode Islanders with information and resources. RIOHA is home to DigiAGE, which aims to bridge the digital divide for older adults, including device access, internet connectivity, training programs, and online content.

Covered Households

Examples of these organizations include:

Crossroads Rhode Island

Crossroads provides housing, education, training, and social services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Device and printer access are offered.

East Bay Community Action Program (CAP) / Warren Health Equity Zone

All **Community Action Programs** work with covered households. For example, East Bay CAP is a place-based collaborative created to reduce and eliminate health disparities and barriers to wellness; they provide device access, digital skills and technical support, and telehealth services and support.

Foster Forward

Foster Forward provides computer access and wi-fi to youth who have aged out of foster care.

Incarcerated Individuals

Examples of these organizations include:

Formerly Incarcerated Union of Rhode Island

FIURI is a network of formerly incarcerated individuals and their families who share information on workforce development, civic, advocacy, and social opportunities.

Open Doors

Provides wraparound services for formerly incarcerated individuals, including employment, transportation, addiction recovery, and housing applications.

Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC)

RIDOC's Educational Services unit provides a variety of classes, including Adult Basic Education, GED, Job Readiness, and Vocational Training. Facilities have computer labs for students to enhance their computer skills.

Turning Around Ministries

Turning Around Ministries (TAM) is a nonprofit faith-based organization targeting formerly incarcerated persons in Newport County. TAM offers referrals to social services, mentoring, emergency housing, education, and job preparation.

Individuals with disabilities

Examples of these organizations include:

Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL)

OSCIL provides a full range of independent living services and resources for individuals with disabilities and seniors. Includes an Assistive Technology program to help individuals acquire assistive devices along with training on how to use them. Also includes a Smart Home Technology Program to help modify the homes of individuals with disabilities using smart technology to improve independent living.

Providence Public Library

PPL offers assistive technology (including assistive listening devices and assistive technology on computers) and assistive services (assistance with downloading audiobooks or e-books).

TechACCESS of Rhode Island

TechACCESS offers assistive technology, training, and evaluation services to individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with a language barrier

These individuals include English Language Learners, Immigrants or Refugees, and Individuals with Low Literacy. Examples of these organizations include:

Institute for Labor Studies & Research (ILSR)

ILSR provides education and training to enable Rhode Islanders to have a stronger voice in the workplace, to participate more effectively in Rhode Island's evolving job market, and to create a more just and equitable society. ILSR leads the Workplace Adult Literacy Project that provides English as a Second Language (ESL) education, Adult Basic Education (ABE), and technology training at their place of employment.

Newport Community School: Aquidneck Island Adult Learning Center

AIALC offers adult education, including literacy and numeracy instruction, workplace literacy, computer literacy, and English Language Acquisition. The Center also offers a Learning Lab where students and community members can receive assistance with online job and college applications, resume development and other technology-based needs.

Progreso Latino

Progreso Latino serves Rhode Island's Latino and immigrant communities through adult education, early childhood education, senior services, workforce development, and other social service programs, including a bilingual digital literacy program through its Bridge to Careers program.

Veterans

Examples of these organizations include:

Providence Vet Center

PVC provides individual and group counseling services, mental health care, whole health care, referrals, and telehealth services to veterans.

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

VFW-RI provides resources and programs to veterans and their families to ensure connectedness with fellow veterans and the community.

Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group

Examples of these organizations include:

Amos House

Amos House's programs include food, social services, job training and employment, and health services. Among Covered Populations, Amos House serves individuals who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups, individuals with language barriers, covered households, aging individuals, and the formerly incarcerated. Its digital equity services include computer/device access and digital skills support.

Blackstone Valley Community Action Program

BV CAP serves families in Pawtucket, Central Falls, Cumberland, Lincoln, and Woonsocket, and has a staff that reflects the ethnic diversity of their community and understanding of their clients' culture and language.

Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE)

DARE consists of campaign organizers for low-income and communities of color through base building, direct action organizing, leadership development, and movement building. The Tenant and Homeowners Association (THA), a

current campaign, partners with nonprofit attorneys to design and advocate for housing policies impacting low-income and communities of color at the municipal and state level.

Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area

According to the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) classification, eighteen (18) of Rhode Island's thirty-nine (39) municipalities are rural.¹⁸ Several rural organizations have created and implemented digital equity initiatives. Examples of these organizations include:

Rural Libraries

Libraries are located in every rural municipality. These rural libraries provide vital digital equity resources for their communities, including public computers, Wi-Fi, and technology assistance. The [Brownell Library](#) in Little Compton, for example, offers a Tech Help program for drop-in assistance and lends out hotspots.

Scituate School Department

Scituate School Department prepares students to be responsible and productive users of technology through technology-rich learning environments, technology investments, and training to support students' educational needs.

Town of Hopkinton

Town of Hopkinton is partnering with OSHEAN to bring gigabit-speed internet to all rural and non-town-owned streets and to provide gigabit-speed internet in the new Community Learning Center, which will offer public access to a computer lab, printer/copy/scan functionality, and provide various training programs for job placement, education, and health services.

3.2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

To assess the digital equity needs and barriers of Rhode Island residents, the Corporation collected and analyzed a combination of quantitative and qualitative data from a diverse range of sources. These include:

- **American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates**, providing detailed data on broadband subscriptions and device access for Rhode Islanders, including most Covered Populations.¹⁹
- **FCC National Broadband Map (NBM)**, for preliminary locations in Rhode Island that are unserved or underserved by broadband.
- **NTIA Internet Use Survey**, for data on types of internet use among Rhode Islanders.

¹⁸ Defining Rural Rhode Island: <https://health.ri.gov/publications/definitions/2022Rural-definition.pdf>

¹⁹ ACS does not offer data on individuals who are incarcerated. For individuals facing language barriers, the ACS offers data on those who are limited English proficient, but not on individuals who have low literacy. ACS statistics for rural residents were calculated using RIDOH's definition of rural municipalities.

- **The Corporation’s Rhode Island Internet Connectivity Survey**, administered in 2023 to collect data on internet access, service speeds and satisfaction, and affordability.
- **Community conversations** held by Corporation staff with Covered Population members and organizations serving Covered Populations to assess digital equity needs and interests. These conversations occurred at ACP outreach events and Digital Inclusion Week activities.
- **The Corporation’s statewide digital equity workshops**, with fifty-five (55) participants from across the state’s digital equity ecosystem.
- **Focus group, interview, and survey data collected by Skills for Rhode Island’s Future (SkillsRI)**, a statewide workforce development nonprofit organization, for their report on digital equity conducted in partnership with the Corporation, the Governor’s Office, and other State leaders. This includes thirteen (13) focus groups with community members and digital skills providers; twenty-seven (27) interviews with key stakeholders such as libraries, employers, and government agencies; a Community Survey with 278 respondents; and an Employer Survey with sixty-five (65) respondents.
- **Survey data** of RI Department of Education (RIDE)’s Adult Education students, with 2,153 respondents.

The Corporation is additionally currently conducting a comprehensive Statewide Digital Equity Public Survey to identify the state’s baseline for each of the DEA’s five Measurable Objective categories both statewide and for each Covered Population. Digital Equity Public Survey data will be integrated into our needs assessment as responses are received and analyzed.

“Where I live, there is no competition...so I pay a lot more for that because there is no marketplace incentive. Before I could get companies to compete and now I have only one provider.”

– Digital Learning Instructors Focus Group participant

3.2.1 Statewide Needs Assessment

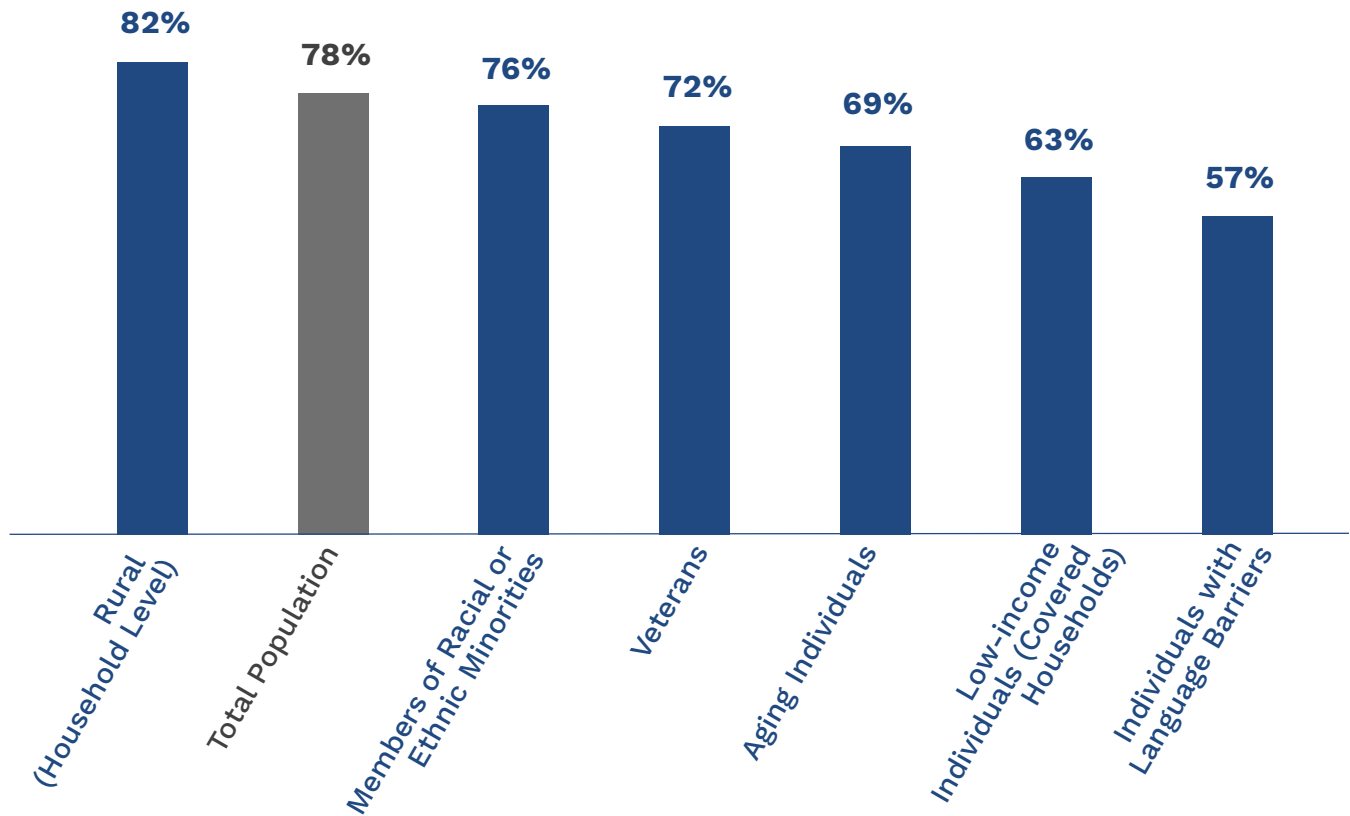
Broadband Availability and Affordability

According to FCC’s NBM data, Rhode Island has high broadband availability compared with other states. Rhode Island has 2,309 unserved and 586 underserved locations. However, as noted in Rhode Island’s BEAD Initial Proposal, the Corporation plans to revise this list through a pre-challenge reclassification process and then follow-on challenge process, which

will complement the FCC’s broadband data, and ensure the most accurate maps possible for Rhode Island.

There are broadband adoption disparities between Covered Populations and the statewide population. According to the ACS, seventy-eight percent (78%) of Rhode Islanders subscribe to broadband internet such as cable, fiber optic, or DSL, yet Covered Populations have significantly lower broadband subscription rates, including individuals with language barriers (57%), individuals with disabilities (63%), and covered households (64%).

Figure 1: Broadband Subscription Rates Among Covered Populations



Source: ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

Certain municipalities in Providence County (Providence and East Providence) and Newport County (Portsmouth) have the lowest broadband subscription rates, with fewer than 33% of households subscribed to broadband in several Census Block Groups.

Affordability was the most frequently cited challenge to broadband access by survey and focus group participants; additional challenges included speed, service reliability, and overall satisfaction with internet service.

Among RI Internet Connectivity Survey respondents:

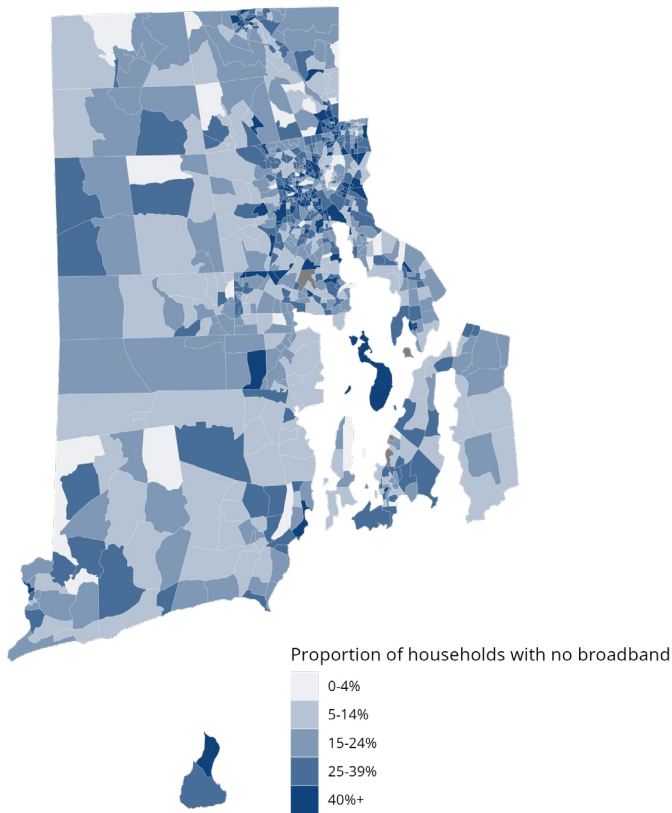
- **Affordability:** 15% said their service was affordable.
- **Service satisfaction:** 53% of respondents are not satisfied with their current service.

- **Service speeds:** 43% of respondents either did not have, or did not know if they are subscribed to, speeds that promise 100/20 Mbps service. Among these respondents, 68% would like access to service at those speeds.
- **Speed tests:** Of the 52 respondents who completed a speed test, 42% had results at underserved speeds (less than 100/20 Mbps) and an additional 13% had results at unserved (less than 25/3 Mbps).

Only 15%

RI Internet Connectivity Survey respondents said their service was affordable.

Map 2: Broadband Subscription Rates by Census Block Group



Source: ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

Among SkillsRI Community Survey respondents, nearly 40% reported that internet connectivity in their area is too unreliable or too slow; approximately 10% indicated no service availability in their area.

Participants in the statewide workshop discussions cited the burden of internet costs for individuals with fixed incomes and/or benefit reliance. Additional feedback included the limited ISP options leading to lower quality services at higher prices and the lack of service cost transparency, including an inability to ascertain a final price prior to subscription and/or unanticipated price changes without prior notice. Participants also expressed concern for the time-limited ACP funding, which, if program funding expires, would result in an increase in

the amount of Rhode Islanders who will struggle to afford internet service. Most notably, participants stated that the opportunity costs and long-term adverse economic impact from limited digital access for individuals, families, local communities, and the state would far exceed the costs to implement digital equity initiatives.

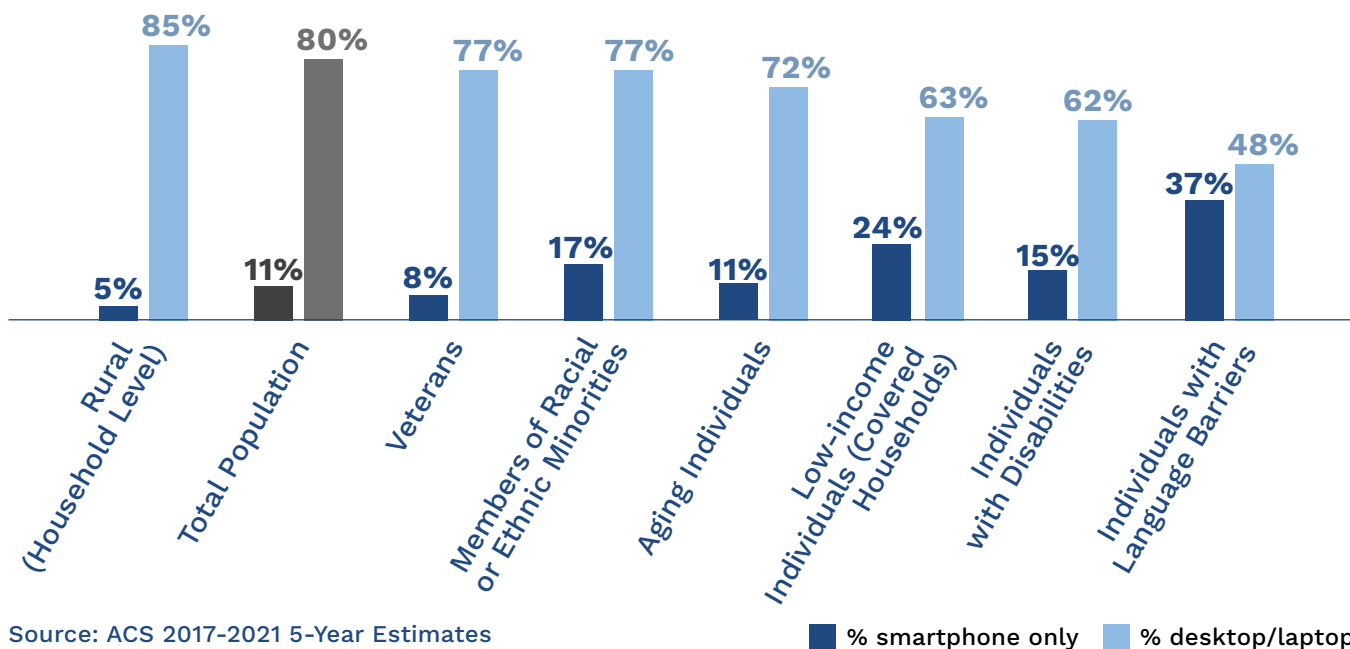
Availability and Affordability of Devices

Eighty percent (80%) of Rhode Islanders have a desktop or laptop computer at home, with significantly lower home desktop or laptop computer rates among Covered Populations, including limited English proficient households (48%), individuals with disabilities (62%) and covered households (63%). Eleven percent (11%) have a smartphone as their only home computing device, a percentage that significantly increases among Covered Populations with one-third of limited English proficient households and nearly one-quarter of covered households identifying a smartphone as their only device.

Providence, East Providence, and Pawtucket have the highest proportion of households having smartphones as their only home computing device. In the ten Census block groups with the highest smartphone-only rates, 45% have smartphones as their only home computing devices.

SkillsRI held focus groups with digital skill instructors whose students represent multiple Covered Populations. In these focus groups, instructors reported that the lack of reliable devices is a barrier to online class participation, and that smartphones inhibit quality class participation. According to RIDE's survey of Adult Education students, 41% of its students, were without a device suitable for distance learning.

Figure 2: Device Access Among Covered Populations



“Those that are joining [online classes] with smartphones – it’s a poor substitute. I can tell who is joining with a smartphone, they don’t participate as much as those with computers.”

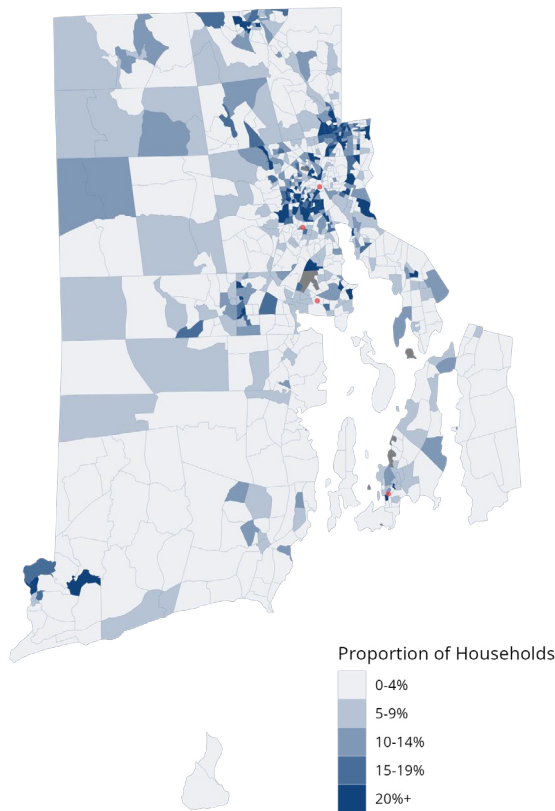
– Digital Learning Instructors Focus Group participant

Statewide workshop participants and other stakeholders cited the cost of devices as a major barrier and identified aging individuals, individuals with disabilities, and covered households as the most impacted. They also cited the need for device distribution to align with digital literacy training

“If they do the computer training here, but they can’t take it home to practice, they’re not going to have that skill.”

– Community-Based Organization Interviewee

Map 3: Households with Smartphones as Their Only Computing Device by Census Block Group



Source: ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

and that allocated devices offer the accessibility features needed by differently abled individuals.

“Government gives out refurbished Androids which are a waste when people have accessibility issues.”

– Statewide workshop participant

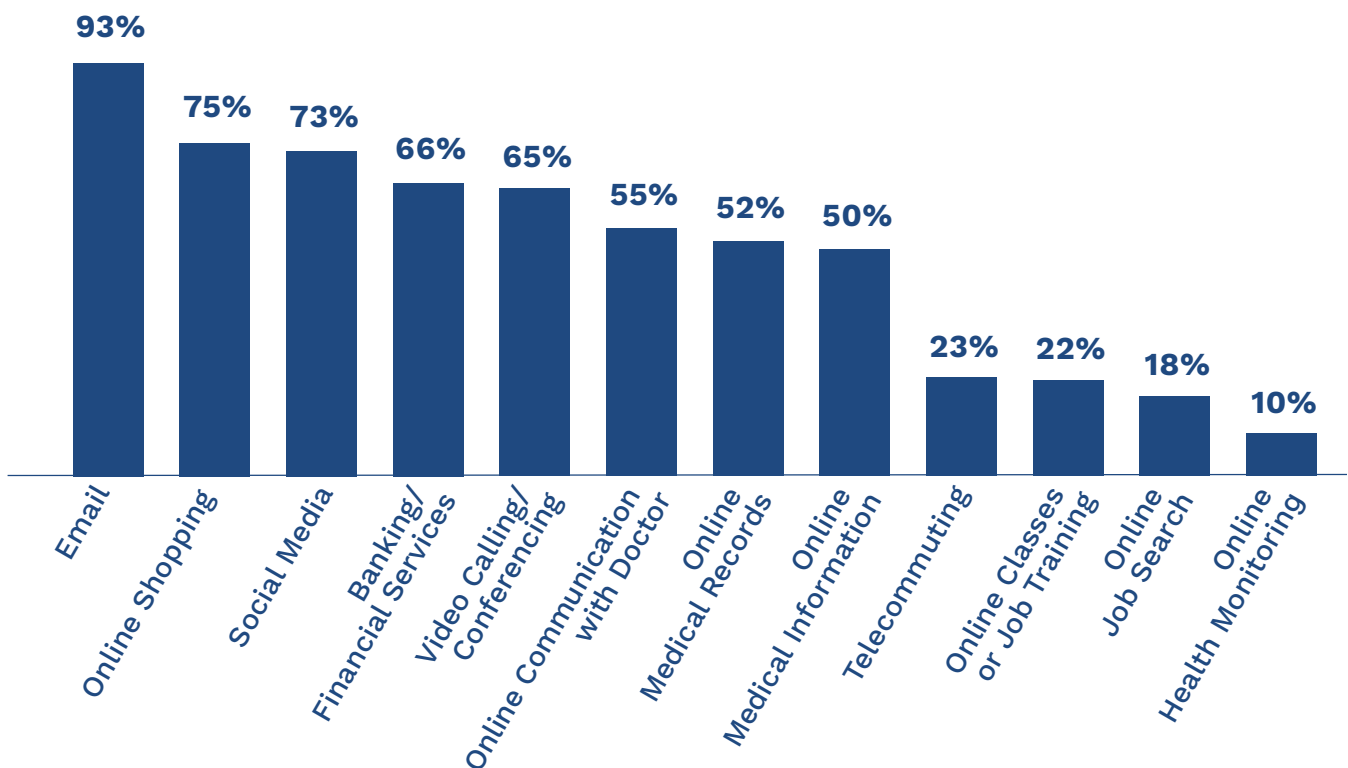
Digital Literacy

As discussed in [Chapter 2.2](#), the Corporation is still collecting data through the Digital Equity Public Survey to establish baselines for digital literacy, skills, and confidence. While this survey is still being conducted, the Corporation is using the 2021 NTIA Internet Use Survey’s data on the online activities of Rhode Island’s internet users for preliminary baselines on digital literacy. According to the NTIA data, Rhode Island residents use internet for the following activities:

- email (93%)
- online shopping or consumer services (75%)
- social networking or social media (73%)
- banking and paying bills (66%)
- video conferencing (65%)
- online communication with doctors (55%)
- online medical record services (52%)
- telecommuting (23%)
- taking online classes or job training (22%)
- job search or application (18%)

As Rhode Island seeks to advance State priorities in employment, education, and health, improving these rates will help ensure access to activities that support individual and community well-being.

Figure 3: Online Activities Among RI Internet Users



“Signing up for Medicare or SNAP. It’s **frustrating to use**, especially for the senior population. We end up having to take the computer from them to do it for them. It doesn’t help them learn.”

– Statewide workshop participant

“We also see that with first generation and seniors. We also serve younger people who are digital natives, they are very savvy with smartphones, but everything is shorthand. **They don’t know how to do formal emails, job applications, attaching documents.** They think they know how to do everything, but they have gaps.”

– Statewide workshop participant

According to a **recent study** conducted by the National Skills Coalition and the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, **90% of all job postings in Rhode Island likely require digital skills and 48% definitely require a level of digital technology knowledge. Further, jobs requiring digital skills increase hourly wages by 23%.**

SkillsRI Employer Survey respondents reinforced these findings sharing that the digital talent gap has been widening, with the greatest divide among low-income individuals and families, aging individuals, immigrant families and individuals with language barriers, children from the urban core, and formerly incarcerated individuals. Statewide workshop participants

noted significant digital literacy gaps in “foundational” digital skills, which are now prerequisites for employment (e.g., online job applications, professional email etiquette, etc.), including among young adults, who are often assumed to be “digital natives.” As with other demographics, a lack of digital skills may impact their long-term economic stability.

Across SkillsRI focus groups, several community members mentioned being aware of classes and services at their local libraries or other community anchors to learn digital skills, but childcare and transportation can be barriers to participation. Existing digital literacy training programs experience staffing shortages, limited

“We need to develop and sustain robust programming. **The key word is ‘robust.’** When the funding ends, the program ends, and we have to start from zero every time.”

– Digital Equity Working Group member

“There needs to be **trainings** to get people from the Basics to Advanced.”

– Digital Equity Working Group member

multi-skill level and multi-language classes, and insufficient long-term funding options. Individualized instruction was also identified as a necessity for digital skills training.

Online Privacy and Cybersecurity

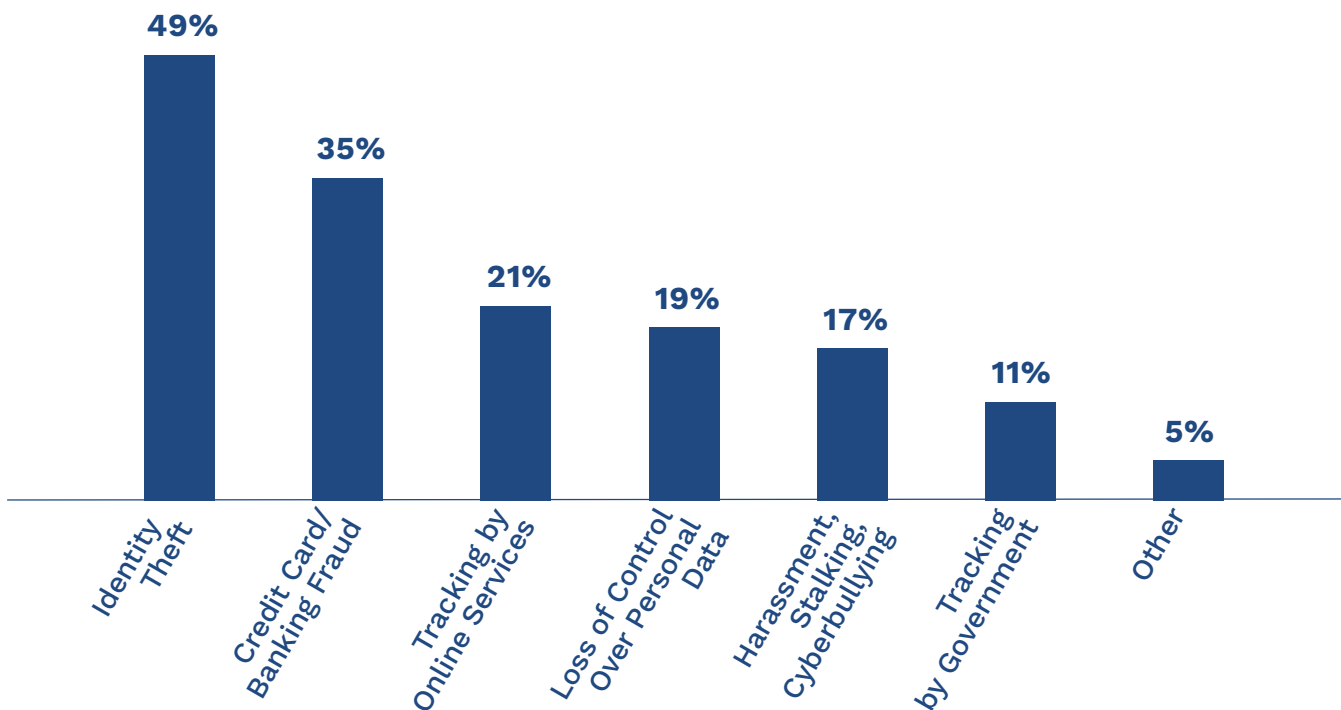
Many Rhode Islanders have personal experience with or major concerns about online privacy, safety, and cybersecurity. In 2022, over 1,100 Rhode Islanders made a report to the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3).²⁰ These Rhode Islanders experienced a combined total monetary loss of \$21.8 million, or an average of \$19,500 per victim. Additionally, among Rhode Island’s internet users, 22% have experienced an online security breach, identity theft, or a similar crime, indicating that many incidents

go unreported. Identity theft (49%) and credit card or banking fraud (35%) are the most concerning privacy or cybersecurity risks for Rhode Islanders.

Online privacy and security were concerns for both SkillsRI Community Survey and Employer Survey respondents. Among Community Survey respondents, approximately one-third could not recognize a phishing attempt; the majority indicated a need for more education related to internet scams. Among employers, most respondents identified online privacy and security training for employees as a top digital skill priority.

Across multiple focus groups, participants expressed online privacy, safety, and cybersecurity concerns for children and youth.

Figure 4: Highest Concerns for Online Privacy and Cybersecurity



Source: NTIA Internet Use Survey 2021

20 FBI Internet Crime Report 2022: https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2022_IC3Report.pdf

“I put ‘block’ everything on the code - but on the tablet, I have to code everything.

I want to protect my kids.”

– Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island Focus Group

“A focus on safety and exposure for young kids and children. It is important to protect your kids and their exposure online at such a young age... There should be more focus on restrictions on adult sites and even for scams – kids are more susceptible.”

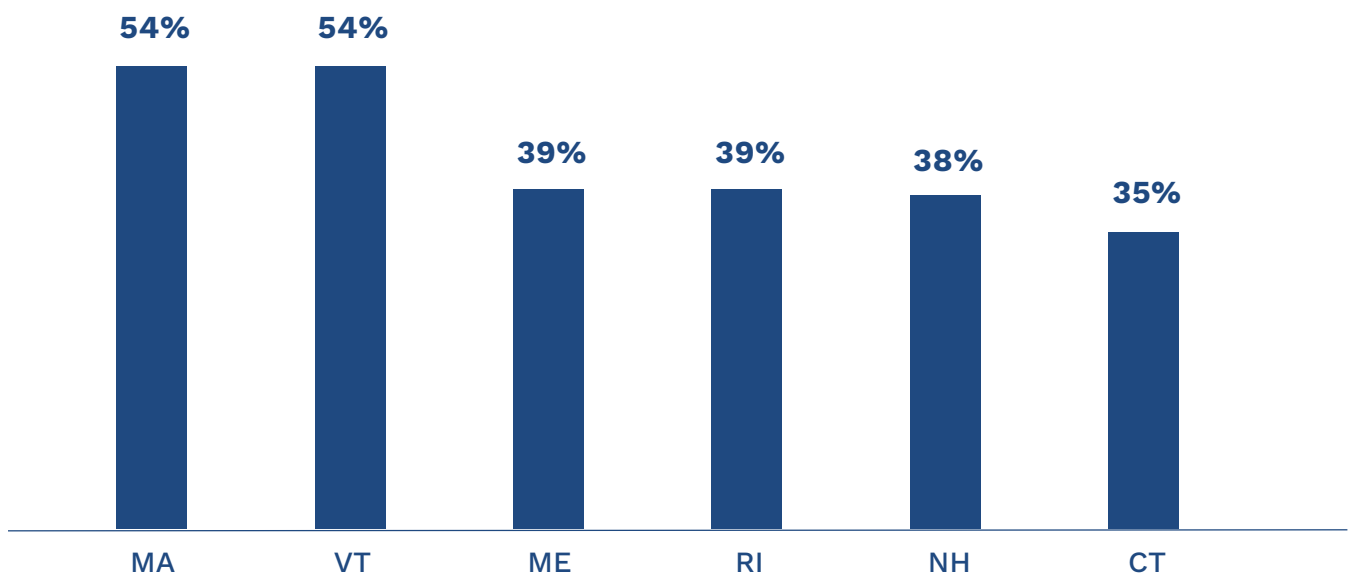
– Pawtucket School District Focus Group

Online Accessibility and Inclusivity of Public Resources and Services

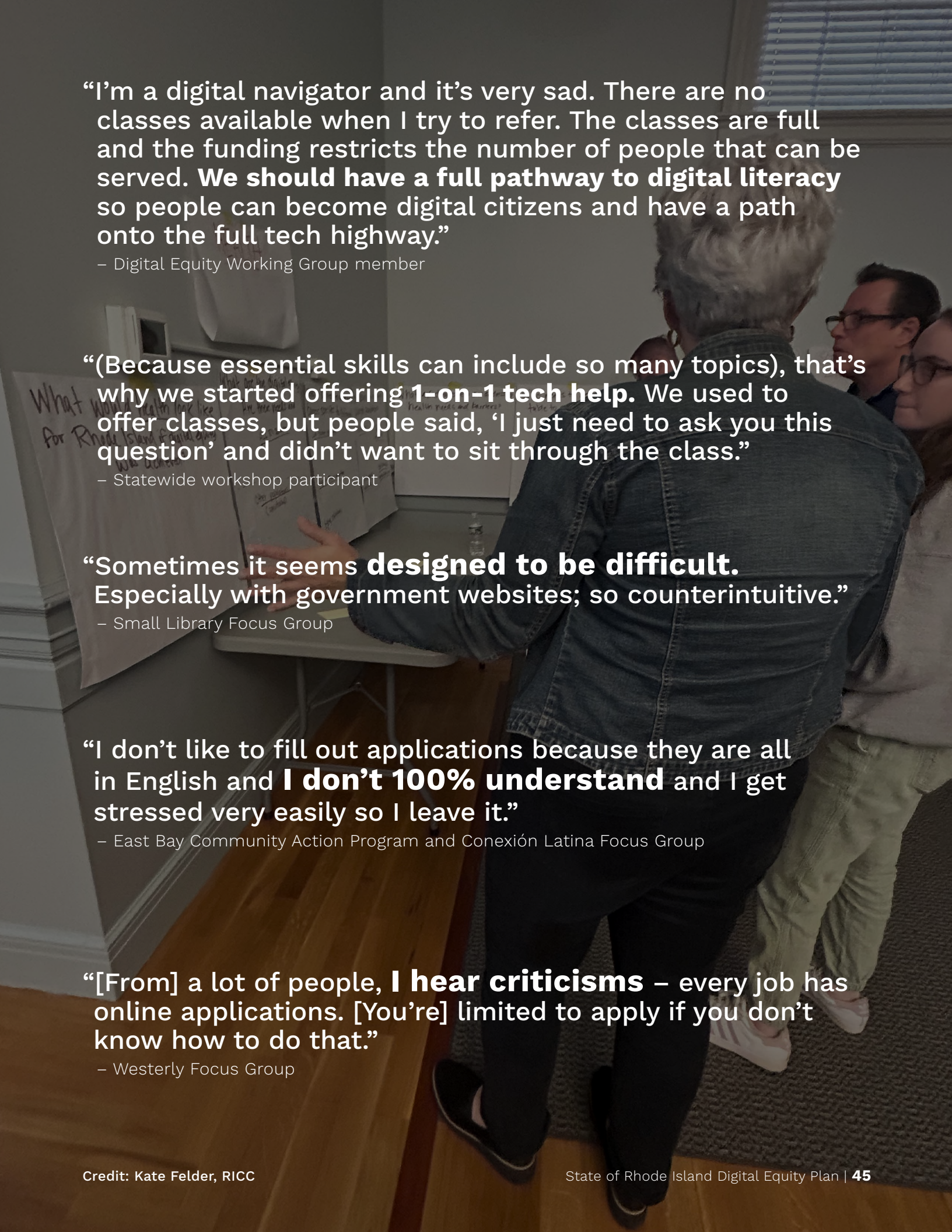
Among Rhode Island’s internet users, only 39% use it to access government services, including voter registration or driver license renewal, according to the 2021 NTIA Internet Use Survey. This rate is similar to other New England states, but trails Massachusetts and Vermont, where the majority use internet to access online government services.

In SkillsRI focus groups and interviews, several stakeholders and residents mentioned the need to improve the accessibility of government websites and online services. The process of filling out online applications is a barrier to accessing public benefits and services.

Figure 5: Accessing Online Government Services Among New England States



Source: NTIA Internet Use Survey 2021

A group of people, including an older woman in a denim jacket, are gathered around a whiteboard in a workshop. The whiteboard has handwritten notes, including "What...", "For R...", and "Health needs and barriers". The background shows a window with blinds.

“I’m a digital navigator and it’s very sad. There are no classes available when I try to refer. The classes are full and the funding restricts the number of people that can be served. **We should have a full pathway to digital literacy** so people can become digital citizens and have a path onto the full tech highway.”

– Digital Equity Working Group member

“(Because essential skills can include so many topics), that’s why we started offering **1-on-1 tech help**. We used to offer classes, but people said, ‘I just need to ask you this question’ and didn’t want to sit through the class.”

– Statewide workshop participant

“Sometimes it seems **designed to be difficult**. Especially with government websites; so counterintuitive.”

– Small Library Focus Group

“I don’t like to fill out applications because they are all in English and **I don’t 100% understand** and I get stressed very easily so I leave it.”

– East Bay Community Action Program and Conexión Latina Focus Group

“[From] a lot of people, **I hear criticisms** – every job has online applications. [You’re] limited to apply if you don’t know how to do that.”

– Westerly Focus Group

3.2.1 Covered Population Needs Assessment: Needs, Interests, and Barriers

The following section describes the needs and barriers that have been identified for each Covered Population. This assessment also notes the intersections between Covered Populations, indicating when needs and barriers are shared across multiple groups.

Figure 6: Intersections between Rhode Island’s Covered Populations²¹

	Aging individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Racial or ethnic minorities	Covered households	Individuals with language barriers	Rural residents
Aging individuals	100%	14%	27%	11%	16%	4%	21%
Veterans	67%	100%	28%	10%	10%	0%	25%
Individuals with disabilities	57%	13%	100%	20%	28%	5%	16%
Racial or ethnic minorities	16%	3%	13%	100%	23%	11%	4%
Covered households	37%	5%	31%	38%	100%	8%	9%
Individuals with language barriers	42%	1%	24%	82%	35%	100%	5%
Rural residents	29%	7%	12%	6%	9%	1%	100%

Source: ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

²¹ As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, ACS does not offer data on individuals who are incarcerated.

COVERED HOUSEHOLDS

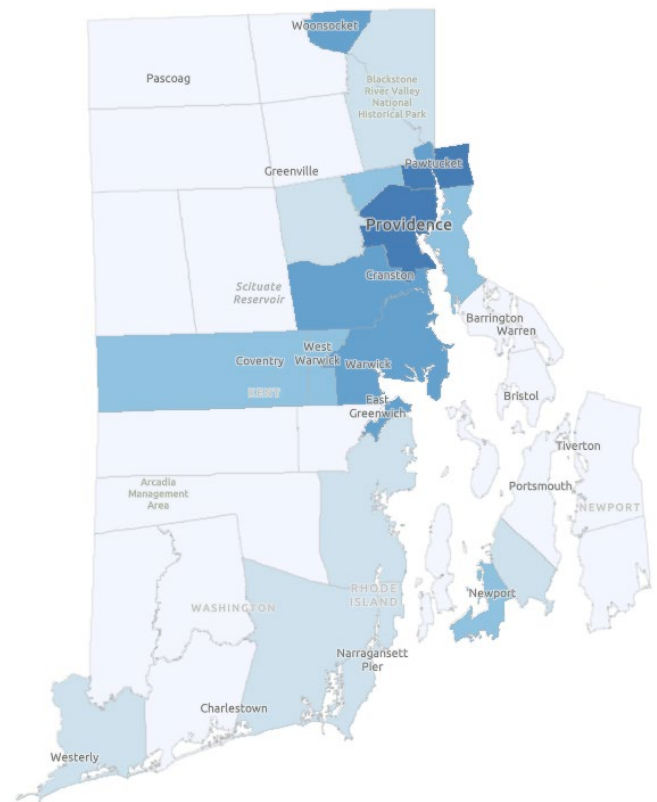
Among Rhode Islanders in covered households, 38% are members of racial or ethnic minority communities, 37% are aging individuals, and 31% have a disability. According to RI Kids Count, there is a concentration of childhood poverty in four core cities —Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket; 64% of Rhode Island’s children live below the poverty line in these cities.²²

Only 64% of covered households are subscribed to broadband, with a similar rate (63%) of desktop or laptop ownership. SkillsRI focus group participants identified reliable access to devices and connectivity, especially for youth and unhoused individuals, affordability concerns, even for borrowed devices, and the cost of device upkeep as barriers to digital equity. The lack of connectivity and devices, in addition to challenges such as housing and food insecurity, also become barriers to learning digital skills.

“Kids should have more computers in Providence, computers promote education. People aren’t learning how to read or how to do technology. Low-income neighborhoods shouldn’t suffer because they are poor. I lived in Providence in the neighborhoods, I’m concerned about those kids learning.”

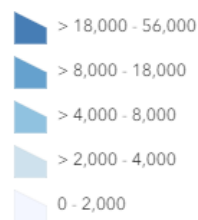
– RI Regional Adult Learning Focus Group

Map 5: Covered Household Population by Municipality

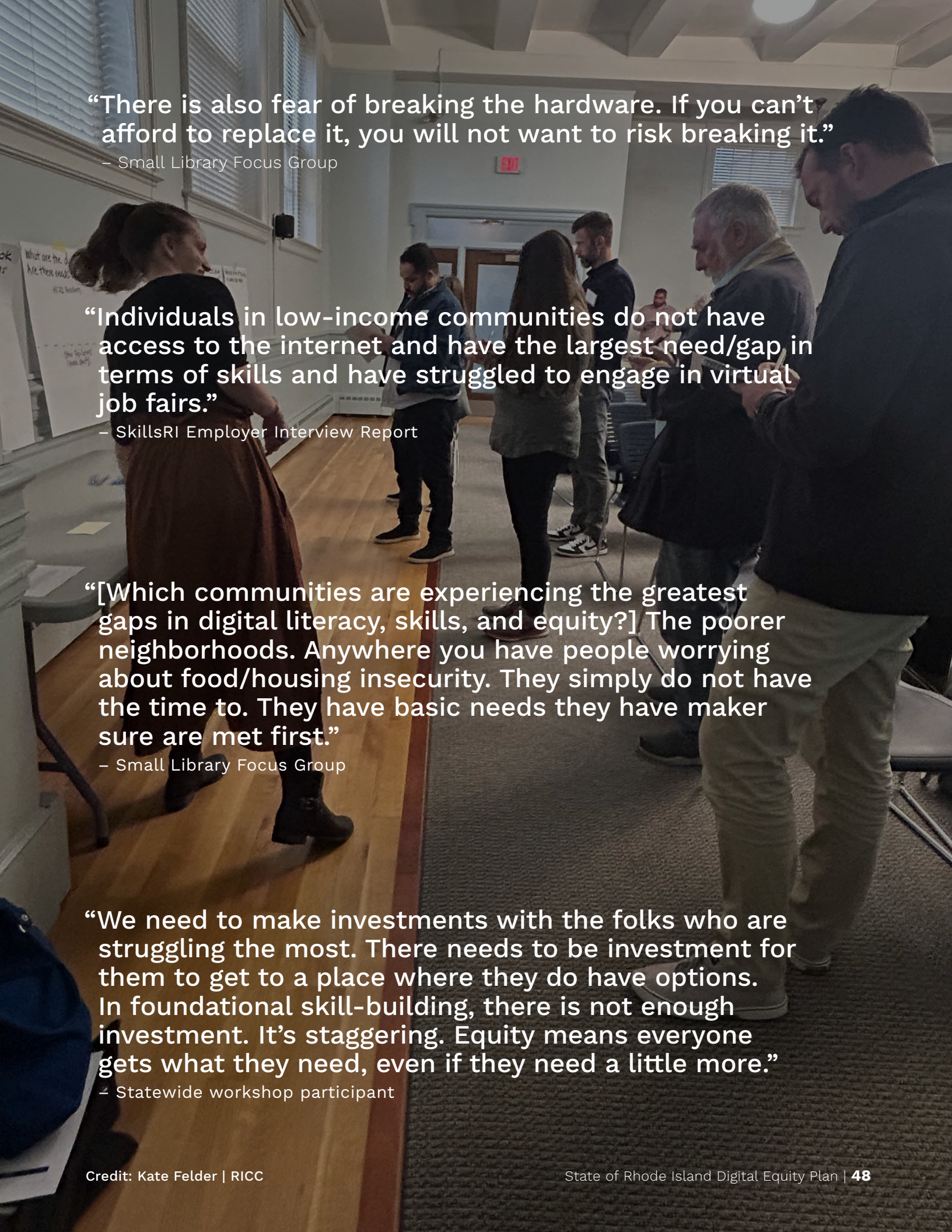


Low Income

Population Below 150% Poverty Line - Low income



²² RI Kids Count: https://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/2023%20Factbook%20Files/2023_Factbook.pdf?ver=2023-05-10-100640-057



“There is also fear of breaking the hardware. If you can’t afford to replace it, you will not want to risk breaking it.”

– Small Library Focus Group

“Individuals in low-income communities do not have access to the internet and have the largest need/gap in terms of skills and have struggled to engage in virtual job fairs.”

– SkillsRI Employer Interview Report

“[Which communities are experiencing the greatest gaps in digital literacy, skills, and equity?] The poorer neighborhoods. Anywhere you have people worrying about food/housing insecurity. They simply do not have the time to. They have basic needs they have maker sure are met first.”

– Small Library Focus Group

“We need to make investments with the folks who are struggling the most. There needs to be investment for them to get to a place where they do have options. In foundational skill-building, there is not enough investment. It’s staggering. Equity means everyone gets what they need, even if they need a little more.”

– Statewide workshop participant

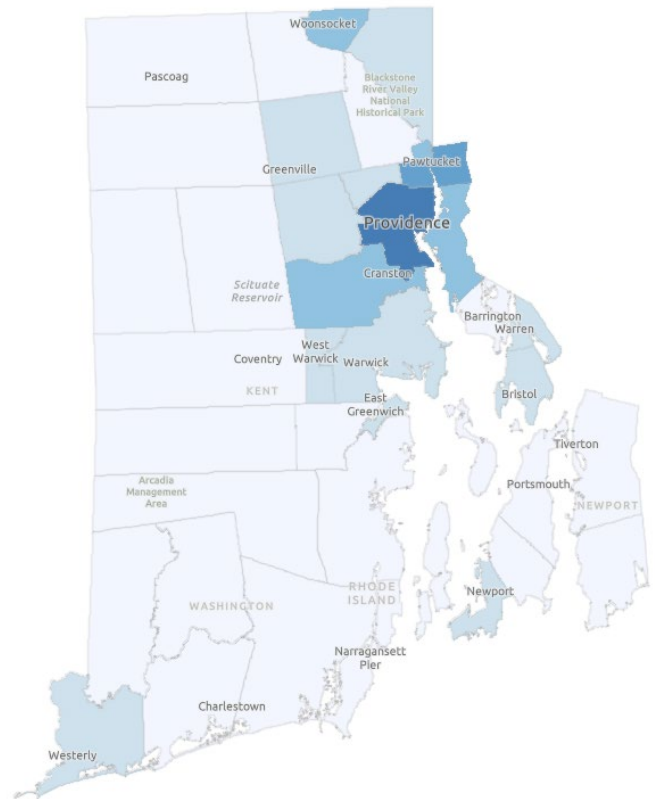
INDIVIDUALS WITH A LANGUAGE BARRIER

Among Rhode Islanders with limited English proficiency language barriers, 82% are members of racial or ethnic minority communities, 42% are aging individuals, and 35% are in covered households.

Those who are limited English proficient have a significantly lower broadband subscription rate (57%) and desktop or laptop computer access rate (48%) compared to statewide averages. According to RIDE’s survey of Adult Education students, lower-level English Language Learners and learners in Adult Basic Education (which is designed to teach literacy skills) were cited as having the most significant barriers to participation in distance learning, including lacking a laptop or tablet, limited home internet service, or an inadequate phone data plan.

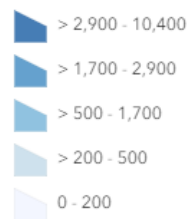
Among SkillsRI focus group participants, those with language barriers expressed difficulty paying for internet at speeds sufficient for their needs, a reluctance to use free Wi-Fi due to security concerns, frustration with outdated devices, and an over-reliance on family and friends for technical assistance supports.

Map 6: Limited English Proficient Households by Municipality



Limited English Proficiency

Limited English Proficiency (less than very well) Households



“Please reduce the price of internet.”

– Central Falls Focus Group

“Sometimes it is so slow. Sometimes I wish I had a larger data plan because I want my kids to have access.”

– East Bay Community Action Program and Conexión Latina Focus Group

“There are places that have free wi-fi access, but it isn’t secure.”

– Central Falls Focus Group

“[I have a computer from] 2016 and it’s already limited – you have to change things already! And I go crazy because I don’t want a new one!”

– Central Falls Focus Group

“My kids are little. Whoever is close and I trust [I ask]. 2 heads are better than 1. Although right now I have a problem with my email, it is full & I can’t open or get new emails. I don’t know how to get rid of email in bulk. I am not sure that email goes through; I am interested in email from school for my kids but I am not sure if it is coming through.”

– East Bay Community Action Program and Conexión Latina Focus Group

In terms of digital literacy, focus group participants mentioned their desire to build digital skills to increase their earnings, either by applying for jobs online or starting an online business. Focus group and Statewide workshop participants highlighted the challenges for immigrants and refugees to access digital skills training due to language barriers and the need for translated materials and instruction, in addition to the previously mentioned childcare and transportation barriers.

“I want to learn more about to use technology because I want to open my own business online... I want to have my product, I want to be my own boss but I want to do it online so people can see it through the website. I want to learn more about that.”

– Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island Focus Group

“At the library, we work a lot with immigrants, and I am also part of that, [and] the language barrier may create a gap for people to access the services & to identify what their needs are. They have no idea what digital literacy is language-wise.”

– Digital Learning Instructors Focus Group

“I wish there was an orientation about how to search for information – how to be sure what I am reading and looking for.”

– East Bay Community Action Program and Conexión Latina Focus Group

“I want to know how to protect my kids. Don’t make friends with anyone you don’t know! My other child goes and blocks these people. I want to learn more about that.”

– Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island Focus Group



AGING INDIVIDUALS

27% of Rhode Island’s aging individuals have a disability and 21% reside in rural municipalities.

Aging individuals have lower broadband subscription rates (69% vs. 78%) and home desktop/laptop rates (72% vs. 80%) compared to statewide averages. SkillsRI focus group participants mentioned a number of barriers for aging individuals to participating in the digital world, including the lack of digital literacy and tech support, the lack of reliable broadband, and the lack of affordability.

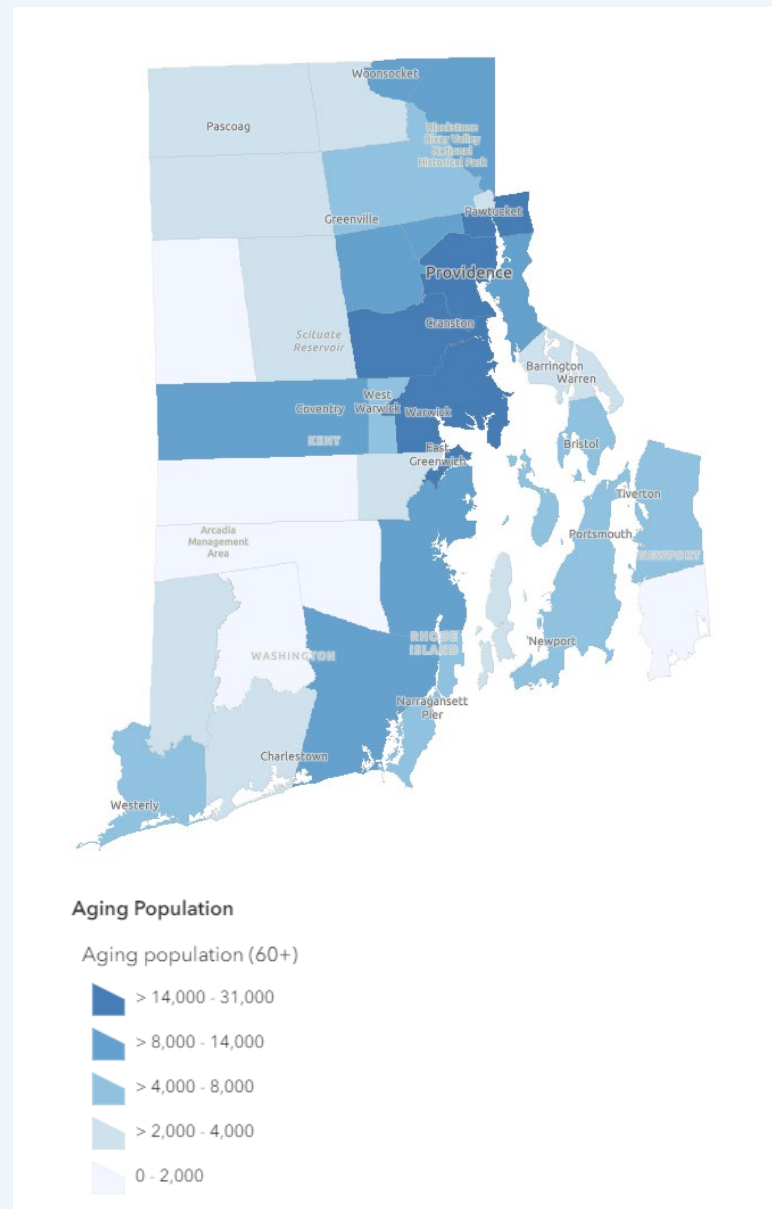
“We are always trying to give our elders access because they can’t afford it.”

– Westerly Focus Group

“Seniors are the most disenfranchised from the tech world. [They say,] ‘Well I could ask my kids this, but they are so frustrated with me.’ They are just people whose kids are busy; they got lost in this and they don’t want to come.”

– Small Library Focus Group

Map 7: Aging Population by Municipality



Aging individuals who participated in SkillsRI focus groups had mixed feelings about the need for technology, but many are taking advantage of available classes and tech support. Skills they are interested in learning include using messaging and videoconferencing apps, such as Skype, Zoom, Google Meet, and Facebook Messenger, and learning more about social media, including distinguishing between public and private spaces and commenting.

“Trying to learn how to type and I love it. Digital navigation and digital literacy—I hated it all my life and now I’m practicing.”

– Cranston Senior Enrichment Center Focus Group

“That’s the way of the world today, you cannot function without having some knowledge of the computers. It petrifies me. I went home to visit my family for a month. When I came back, I know zero of computers, they changed everything to computers to scan a passport. Thank God they had someone there to help... Everything changes so quickly, and the older we get, the less we like change.”

– Cranston Senior Enrichment Center Focus Group

Statewide workshop participants cited the need for digital literacy trainings and tech support for aging individuals; “smart home” technologies for independent living; and online privacy, safety, and cybersecurity awareness to avoid online fraud and scams. They also pointed to the benefits of technology for aging individuals, including captioning, live transcription and device features that support hearing and vision loss needs.

FBI IC3 data also reflects the need for more online safety protections for aging individuals. Noting a growing trend, the FBI IC3 began publishing an Elder Fraud Report in 2020. In 2022, aging individuals represented the largest age group of cybercrime victims in Rhode Island, with 219 victims reported. Even more concerning, their monetary losses totaled \$7.3 million, or an average of \$33,400 per victim.²³

“We work with people with disabilities and seniors, getting people to get comfortable with technology, so they can live on their own.”

– Statewide workshop participant

²³ FBI Elder Fraud Report 2022: https://www.ic3.gov/Media/PDF/AnnualReport/2022_IC3ElderFraudReport.pdf

INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

RIDOC operates six correctional housing facilities. According to RIDOC's 2022 Annual Population Report, approximately half of Rhode Island's incarcerated population are members of racial or ethnic minority groups. Additionally, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)'s Division of Juvenile Corrections operates the Rhode Island Training School as a correctional and rehabilitation program for youth; the current bed count is approximately 55-60.

Thirty-five (35) incarcerated individuals participated in focus groups with SkillsRI. Participants noted that the lack of reliable access to broadband and computers are critical barriers to developing computer confidence and competence needed for successful re-entry. They expressed a desire to learn job-related digital skills, including basic keyboarding, email, resume writing, online job search and application, applying for housing and other benefits, online bill pay, and social media. However, a lack of classes and restrictions on technology make it difficult to pursue their education, and some shared that although they were digitally literate prior to their incarceration, they were falling behind in their digital skills due to the rapid pace of change.

“Textbooks for accounting classes, for example, reference software that they cannot access, learn, or use. School papers are done by hand.”

– SkillsRI Department of Corrections
Focus Group Report

“Technology changes every day. I was very good at it, but it's been four years. Everything is different, and everything is technology. I don't know stuff going on on the outside.”

– SkillsRI Department of Corrections
Focus Group Report

The majority of focus group participants described the discharge planning process as insufficient for successful reentry, with many expressing limited knowledge of community resources and federal programs, including second chance Pell grants. Stakeholders mentioned the need for more digital skills and devices, as well as more user-friendly online public resources.

“Most people know how to do stuff on their phone, but when it comes to actually using a computer to do things, that's when they fall apart...A lot of people in the community that we encounter, formerly incarcerated or homeless, we get a lot of people in here who can't go online to do their bus pass application or can't do their SNAP application because the thing is so confusing.”

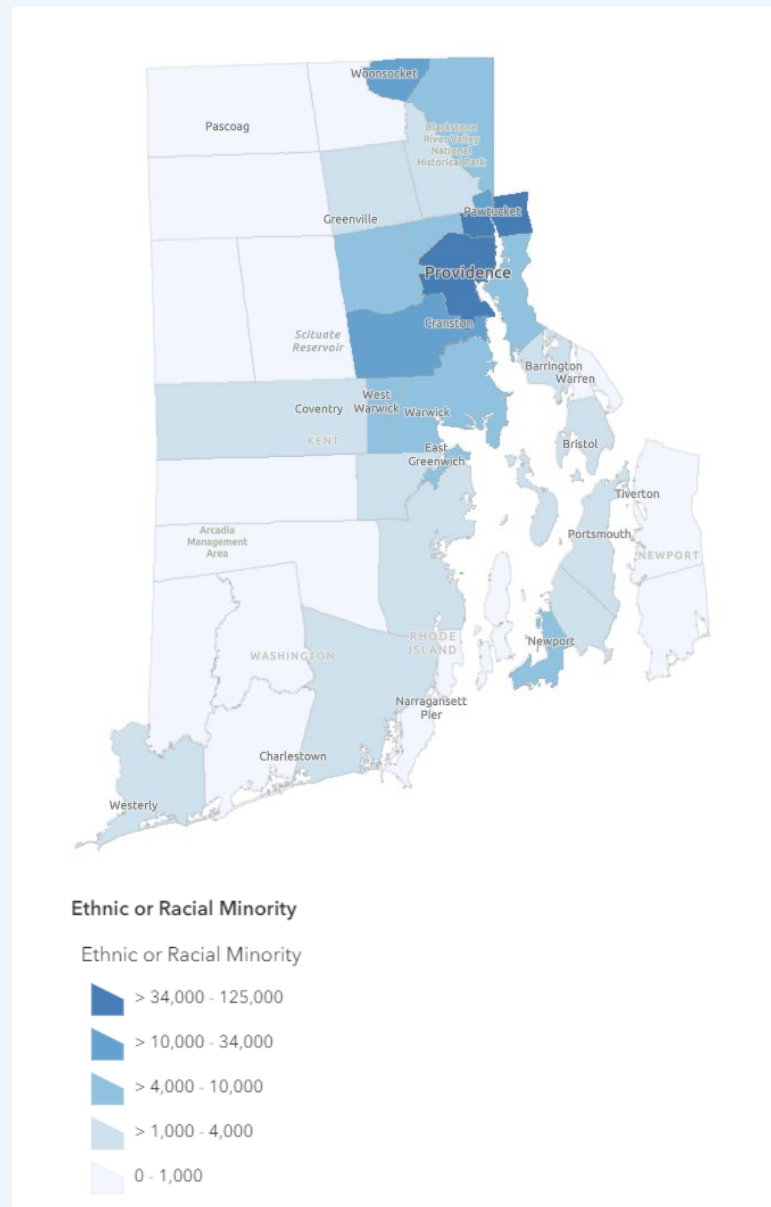
– Community-Based Organization Interview

INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF A RACIAL OR ETHNIC MINORITY GROUP

Rhode Island has a growing population of racial and ethnic minority communities. Between 2010 and 2020, the state’s Hispanic and Latino population grew by 39%, Black or African American population grew by 29%, Asian population grew by 32%, and American Indian and Alaska Native populations grew by 62%.²⁴ Among Rhode Islanders who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups, 23% are in covered households.

As noted above, individuals who are members of racial or ethnic minorities have lower broadband subscription and home desktop or laptop rates compared to statewide averages. Among racial and ethnic groups, Black or African American residents, American Indian residents, and Hispanic residents have the lowest rates of broadband subscription.

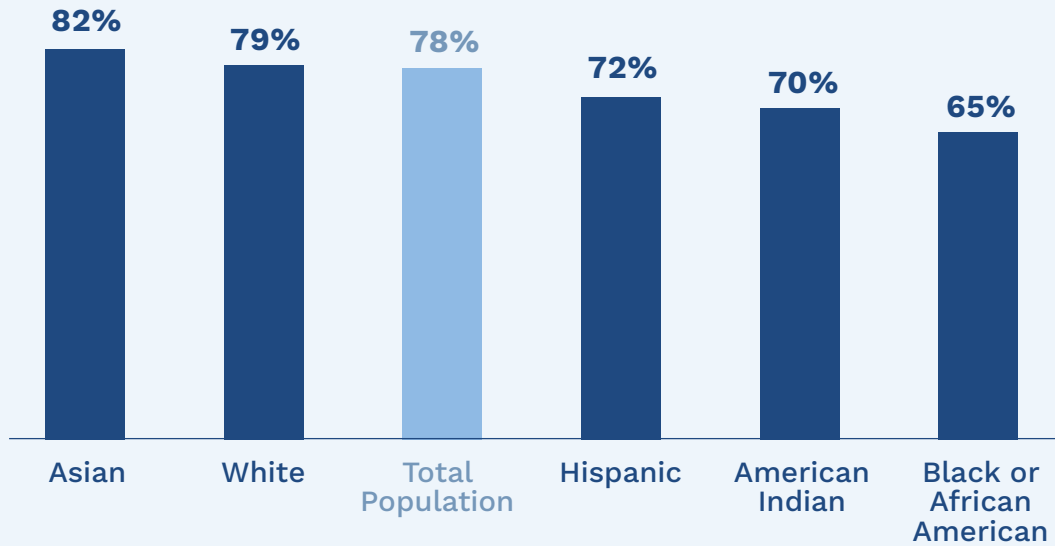
Map 8: Racial or Ethnic Minority Communities by Municipality



Black or African American residents, American Indian residents, and Hispanic residents also have the lowest rates among racial and ethnic groups of home desktop or laptop access and the highest rates of a smartphone as their only home computing device.

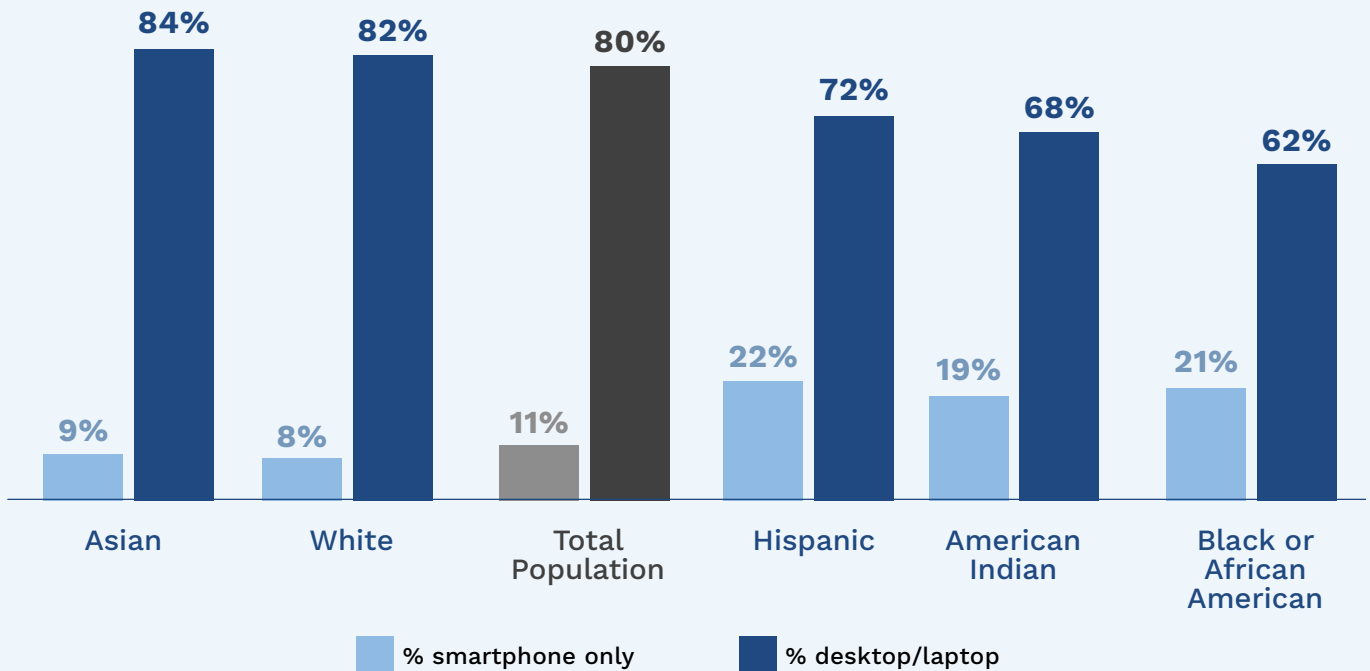
²⁴ US Census Bureau’s Race and Ethnicity in the United States: 2010 Census and 2020 Census: <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/race-and-ethnicity-in-the-united-state-2010-and-2020-census.html>

Figure 3: Broadband Subscription Rates by Race or Ethnicity



Source: ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

Figure 4: Device Access by Race or Ethnicity



Source: ACS 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

Statewide workshop participants described the need for culturally relevant curriculum for digital literacy and higher quality connections in communities of color.

VETERANS

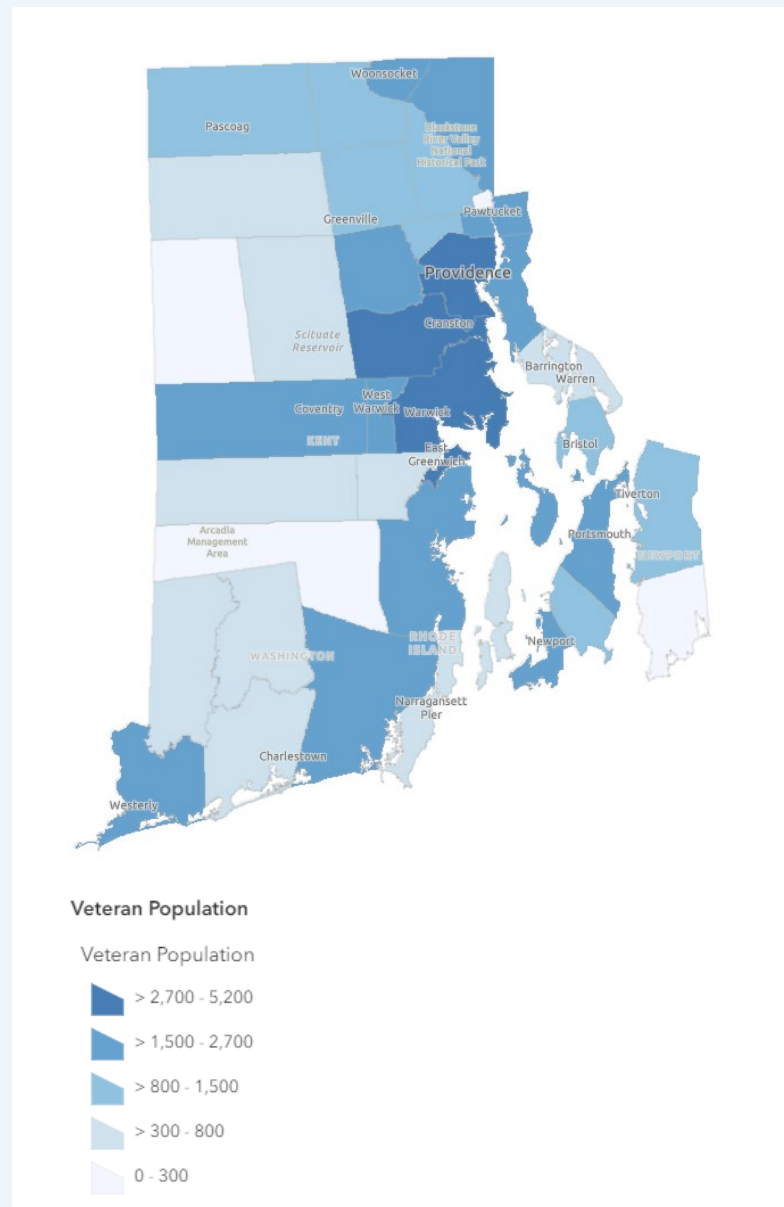
Among Rhode Island’s veterans, 67% are aging individuals, 28% have a disability, and 25% reside in a rural municipality.

Compared to statewide averages, veterans have lower broadband subscription rates (72% compared to 78%) and home desktop/laptop rates (77% compared to 80%).

Statewide workshop participants and veteran-serving organizations interviewed described the need for tech support and group classes specifically for veterans to offer peer-to-peer support, more digital skills training for civilian job opportunities, and subject matter expertise in Veterans Affairs’ online benefits and health services. They also cited the need for raising awareness and training of telehealth and assistive technologies, especially for disabled or wounded veterans.

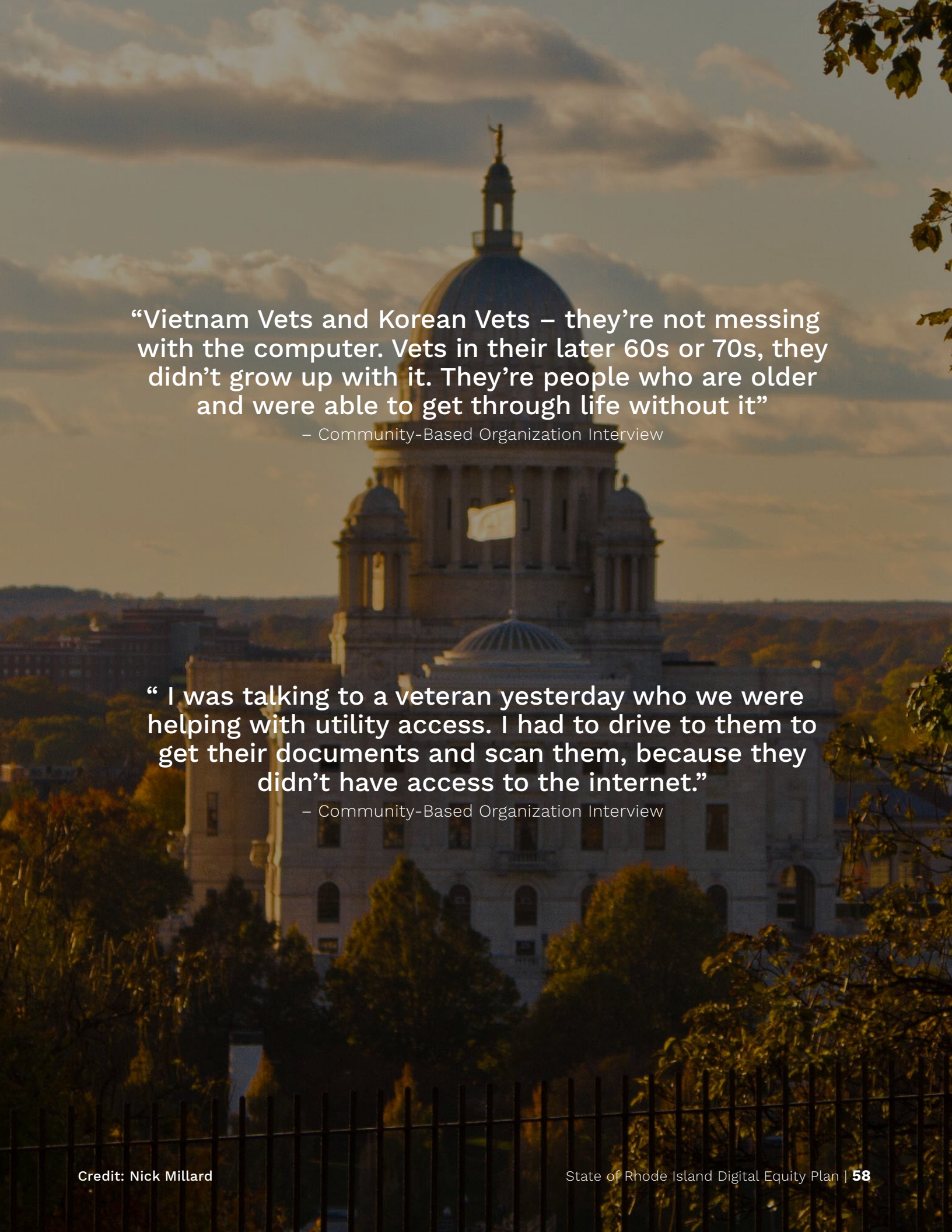
Since the majority of Rhode Island’s veterans are also aging individuals, they face similar barriers such as lacking digital literacy and having inadequate access to broadband or devices.

Map 9: Veteran Population by Municipality



“Yes, I’ve seen barriers. We have a broad range of older vets and younger vets. Once you get past 60, they don’t want anything to do with computers. Depending on who you’re working with, it limits what you can do, like telehealth. People with limited ability to get around or who don’t have a car, they’re a good candidate for telehealth, but they don’t have the equipment or know-how to use it”

– Community-Based Organization Interview

A photograph of the Rhode Island State Capitol building, featuring a large central dome and a smaller dome below it. The building is set against a sky with soft, golden light from the setting or rising sun. The foreground is filled with the silhouettes of trees and a dark metal fence.

“Vietnam Vets and Korean Vets – they’re not messing with the computer. Vets in their later 60s or 70s, they didn’t grow up with it. They’re people who are older and were able to get through life without it”

– Community-Based Organization Interview

“ I was talking to a veteran yesterday who we were helping with utility access. I had to drive to them to get their documents and scan them, because they didn’t have access to the internet.”

– Community-Based Organization Interview

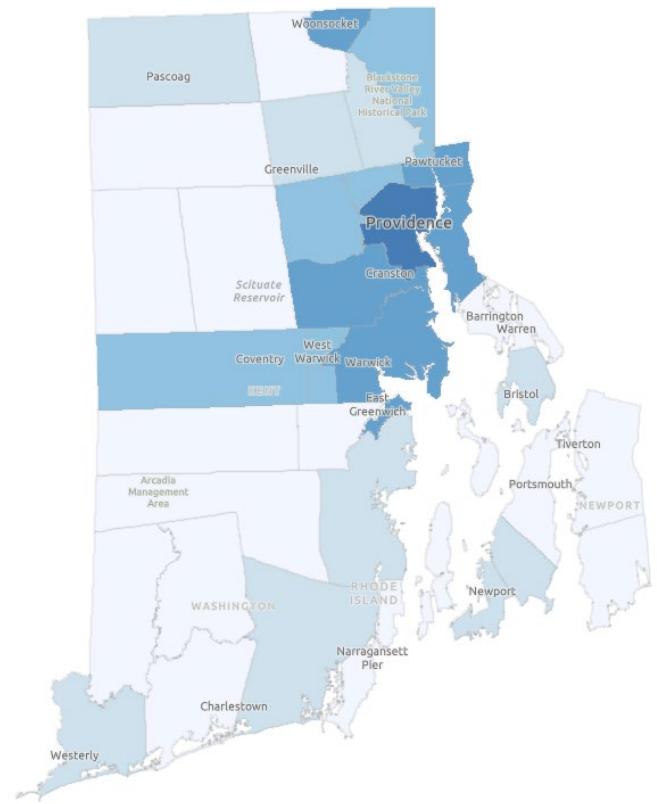
INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Among Rhode Islanders with disabilities, 57% are aging individuals and 28% are in covered households.

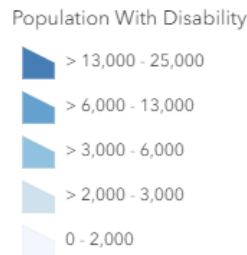
Compared to statewide averages, individuals with disabilities have lower broadband subscription rates (63% compared to 78%) and home desktop/laptop rates (62% compared to 80%).

Statewide workshop participants cited multiple needs and barriers for individuals with disabilities, including the cost of accessible devices (including smartphones with user-friendly accessibility features), the need for appropriate assistive technologies, the lack of accessibility of online public services and resources, and the need for transportation to locations for trainings and basic access to technology. A need for digital navigators and trainers familiar with assistive technology and accessibility features in devices was also identified.

Map 10: Population Living with a Disability by Municipality



Population with Disability



“The need for appropriate adaptive tech and educators who know how to use it.”

– Statewide workshop participant

“Non-disabled folks don’t learn or implement digital accessibility accommodations.”

– Statewide workshop participant

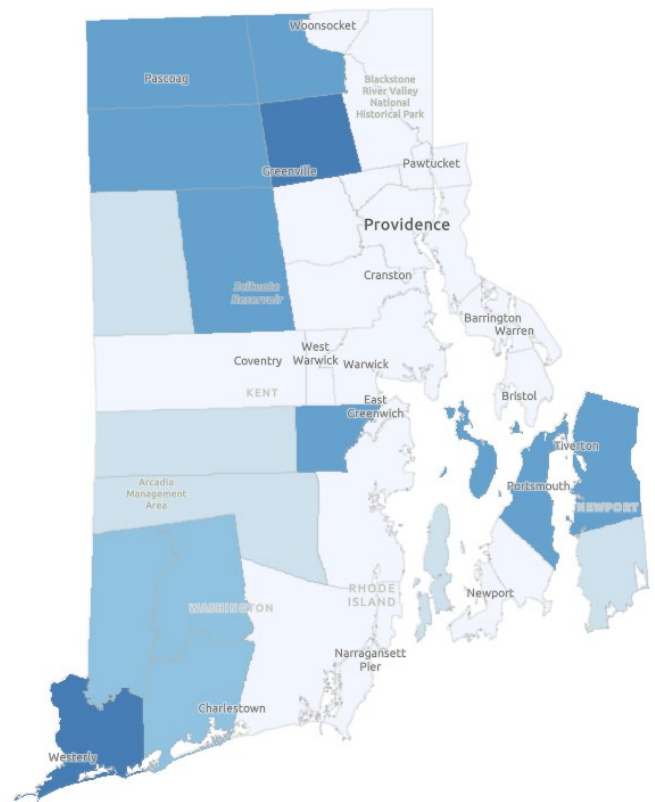
INDIVIDUALS WHO PRIMARILY RESIDE IN A RURAL AREA

Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) classifies 18 of Rhode Island’s 39 municipalities as rural. Among residents of these municipalities, 29% are aging individuals.

Individuals residing in rural areas have high overall dissatisfaction with the quality and affordability of their current internet service, with only 16% reporting that their service is affordable and 67% reporting dissatisfaction with their service.²⁵

Stakeholders cited the lack of high-quality internet connectivity as the main barrier to digital equity for rural residents, impacting their ability to access employment, education, and health services. Individuals from rural municipalities emphasized the need for improved broadband infrastructure, with strong support for both fiber to the premises and wireless technologies.

Map 11: Rural Population by Municipality



Rural Population




“Rural is not defined by geographic remoteness in Rhode Island but by density. Rural areas have much more limited access to digital services.”

– Community-Based Organization Interviewee

Challenges with transportation and the lack of capacity in rural libraries, such as limited staffing and hours,

are also barriers for rural residents to access digital inclusion services.



“We do [go to their homes]. That’s the direction things are going in. We need to do it, because they’re housebound or they don’t have transportation.”

– Statewide workshop participant

“[The biggest need is to] support libraries in rural areas so they can provide tech to patrons.”

– Statewide workshop participant

Summary of Barriers to Digital Equity

Covered Population	Broadband Availability and Affordability	Access to Devices and Technical Support	Digital Literacy	Online Privacy and Cyber-security	Online Accessibility of Public Resources
All	Affordability and reliability of broadband service	Affordability of laptops and desktops Reliance on smartphones limits access to online services, especially distance learning	Need for more training options and resources to meet the needs of each Covered Population (e.g. more 1-on-1 training and multi-skill level classes) Childcare and transportation barriers	Significant concerns about online safety and cybersecurity Need for improved cybersecurity education	Accessibility and usability challenges with online public resources, especially the process of completing online applications
Covered households		Device affordability, including upkeep of devices and maintaining borrowed devices	Lack of connectivity and devices, and challenges such as housing and food insecurity, are barriers to learning digital skills		
Individuals with a language barrier		Frustration with devices becoming outdated Lack of technical assistance and support	Language barriers - the need for translation of digital skills training and materials Lack of connectivity and devices are barriers to participation in distance learning	Security concerns with using free wi-fi	

Covered Population	Broadband Availability and Affordability	Access to Devices and Technical Support	Digital Literacy	Online Privacy and Cybersecurity	Online Accessibility of Public Resources
Aging individuals		Lack of technical assistance and support	Need for more trainings and support for aging individuals, focusing on digital confidence for independent living	Aging individuals are disproportionately impacted by cybercrime Need for more trainings and awareness on online privacy, safety, and cybersecurity	
Incarcerated individuals	Limited access to broadband	Limited access to computers	Lack of reliable access to computers, broadband, and training to develop digital skills and confidence for successful re-entry		
Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Need for higher quality connections in communities of color		Need for culturally relevant digital skills training and curriculum for communities of color		
Veterans		Need for awareness and training on assistive technologies and devices for telehealth	Lack of digital skills training and support specifically designed for veterans		

Covered Population	Broadband Availability and Affordability	Access to Devices and Technical Support	Digital Literacy	Online Privacy and Cyber-security	Online Accessibility of Public Resources
Individuals with disabilities		Affordability of accessible devices Need for appropriate assistive technologies	Need for trainers and digital navigators who are familiar with assistive technology and accessibility features		
Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area	Need for higher quality connections and improved infrastructure		Lack of capacity at rural libraries, such as limited staffing and hours, limits access to training and digital inclusion services		

Community Stories



I'm from Afghanistan and a proud permanent resident of the United States of America, on my way to becoming a citizen. I was an interpreter for the US military in Afghanistan for over 10 years. When I first arrived in Rhode Island in 2021, I knew that I needed a computer to achieve my goals. Even as someone who speaks four languages and is computer literate, getting **a computer was a crucial need** for me and my children. I'm most concerned about my fellow Afghan family members and friends that have settled across Rhode Island. They are struggling—they face **language and cultural barriers, lack of employment, skills and education** and it is difficult meeting basic life needs. We need to do more in Rhode Island so that people who can't afford the internet or a computer or have digital skills can easily have access to such resources so they can also achieve their goals."

– Amin Faqiry



4

Stakeholder Engagement

4.1 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The 2023 Rhode Island Broadband and Digital Equity Strategic Plan sets the following principles for thoughtful stakeholder and community engagement:

- Meet communities where they are
- Enable participatory planning
- Cultivate strong implementation partnerships

Based on these principles, the Corporation developed a coordinated broadband and digital equity stakeholder engagement strategy that addresses both DEA and BEAD requirements. This strategy ensures that equity for Rhode Islanders is the central component of all our activities,

analyses, and assessments. Initial results of the Corporation stakeholder engagement strategy have yielded critical quantitative and qualitative data for a robust, inclusive Digital Equity Plan.

Rhode Island’s stakeholder engagement model is focused on deploying focused promotion and participation strategies to inform and invite participation from key stakeholder groups. The Corporation has prioritized engagement with unserved, underserved, and Covered Population residents in its planning process.

The Corporation’s full-time outreach coordinator leads ongoing stakeholder engagement.

4.2 KEY PARTNERS

The Corporation categorizes stakeholders into four categories: government institutions, community organizations, private sector stakeholders, and the broader public. Grouping stakeholder types allows the Corporation to tailor outreach and engagement initiatives to each group’s broadband and digital equity interests. Customizing engagement content and form to each stakeholder type enhances participant experience.

Stakeholder Category	Description	Entities Engaged	Engagement Type
Government Institutions	The Corporation relies on these stakeholders to convene outreach and engagement events in their respective communities. These stakeholders understand the issue because they are informed of federal policies and because digital inequities deeply impact their constituents’ lives. They serve as champions of the message of digital equity and use their platforms to communicate it to the public and private sectors alike.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State agencies, including RI DOT, RI Housing, RIDE, RIDLT, RIOPC, RIDHS, and others • Municipal governments • The Narragansett Indian Tribe²⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the Digital Equity Working Group • Local government roundtables • Meetings hosted by municipalities and councilmembers • Statewide events, including the Broadband Summit and statewide workshops • Session at the biannual League of Cities and Towns meetings and educational sessions • Updates at the monthly municipal leaders’ call hosted by the Governor’s Office • State government consultations • Virtual and in-person meetings • Surveys

²⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2.3.6, the Corporation has invited the Narragansett Indian Tribe to a formal consultation on how leaders from the state and the Tribe can enhance collaboration in both broadband and digital equity initiatives for the Tribe. Following the public comment period of Rhode Island’s Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Initial Proposal, the Corporation is in contact with a representative of the Tribe to help coordinate this consultation. The Narragansett Indian Tribe, which is the only federally recognized tribe in Rhode Island, has approximately 2,400 registered members and governs a reservation covering 1800 acres in the southern part of the state.

Community Organizations	Community organizations interact most directly with Covered Populations and the broader public, and often have the most responsibility for providing direct services and programming.	Includes organizations that the NTIA considers Community Anchor Institutions, such as schools, libraries, health clinics, health centers, hospitals or other medical providers, public safety entities, institutions of higher education, public housing organizations, or community support organizations that facilitate greater use of broadband service by vulnerable populations, including Covered Populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the Digital Equity Working Group • Engagement with leading community organizations, including AARP and United Way of Rhode Island • Targeted community workshops • Roundtable discussions • Interviews with community leaders and key community organizations • Virtual and in-person meetings • Surveys
Private Sector	These are often broadband service providers or system designers, but also can encompass employers of skilled trades. The private broadband industry is a key driver of digital equity and has been included in various outreach and engagement initiatives.	ISPs, fiber optic cabling installation contractors, fiber optic equipment manufacturers, local Rhode Island businesses, subject matter experts, and other private companies, trade groups, and organizations. Also included in this group are private educational institutions and workforce training providers that are not nonprofits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of the Broadband Advisory Council • Attendees of the Broadband Summit in June 2023 • Recipients of all the Corporation newsletters and emails • Surveys

Broader Public Public participation in planning processes improves decision-making. Lived experience and participatory planning are foundational to the Corporation's broadband and digital equity program development.

Rhode Islanders, including members of Covered Populations

- Community meetings and listening sessions
- In-person and virtual events
- Surveys
- Roundtable discussions
- The Corporation newsletters, emails, and social media marketing

4.3 METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

4.3.1 Surveys

As part of the survey data collection effort, the Corporation has requested input from Rhode Island's government agencies, nonprofits, experts, practitioners, funders, researchers, community organizers, and community members through three surveys:

- **Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey** focusing on agencies and organizations, to understand where digital equity services are offered, the types of programs and services offered, and the populations targeted. Thus far, responses from 116 organizations have been received.
- **RI Internet Connectivity Survey** of residents to collect data about their access to the internet, service speeds and satisfaction, and affordability. Thus far, 743 responses from 727 unique addresses have been received.
- A new **Digital Equity Public Survey*** of residents to assess the State's baseline for each of the five Measurable Objective categories and major barriers to digital equity, both statewide and for each Covered Population.

4.3.2 Events and Listening Sessions

The Corporation has hosted several events and listening sessions for bidirectional engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and the broader public on digital equity and broadband planning. These include:

- **June 2023 Broadband Summit:** Hosted by the Corporation, NTIA, and the RI League of Cities and Towns, which gathered over 170 community leaders and stakeholders in an in-person event with a virtual option to attend. The key purpose of this event was to inform participants about Rhode Island's statewide broadband and digital equity initiative to leverage historic levels of federal funding to close the digital divide in the state. This event brought together partners from across the state to discuss ways to collaborate efficiently and effectively and utilize federal funding to close the digital divide.
- **Listening Sessions:** The Corporation works with community groups to host in-person and virtual listening sessions to target Covered Populations and those who serve them. Often held in conjunction

*closes January 19th, 2024

with the Corporation’s ACP outreach efforts, and many in partnership with the Providence Public Library as another ACP Outreach Grant subawardee, these sessions informed the Corporation’s formulation of Digital Equity priorities and design of future programs. Over 40 sessions were held in 2023, at locations including Providence Ward Community Meetings, Mt. Hope High School (Bristol Warren Regional School District), the West End Food Pantry, Farmers Markets (where SNAP is accepted), and Warren Housing Authority Properties, among many others.

- **Digital Inclusion Week 2023:** The Corporation hosted 13 events across Rhode Island from October 2-6, 2023, as part of the national Digital Inclusion Week. Some events were hosted by members of the Digital Equity Working Group (DEWG), with a goal to spread awareness of resources and to recognize the community partners working toward digital equity.
- **November 2023 Statewide Workshops:** The Corporation hosted two workshops, one held in-person and one virtually, to collaborate with stakeholders

on developing key elements of the Digital Equity Plan. Through interactive sessions and discussions, stakeholders provided input on digital equity needs, assets, and potential solutions in each of the five DEA Measurable Objective categories in alignment with state priorities.

4.3.3 Statewide Digital Equity Working Group (DEWG)

The DEWG is a multistakeholder group that provides input and guidance to the Corporation and helps develop targeted strategies to address digital equity in Rhode Island. The group meets every two weeks to plan events, discuss findings, and to support each other’s work. The DEWG’s specific functions include helping to gather stakeholder engagement, input, and feedback on BEAD and Digital Equity Plans, and facilitating coordination of state agency partners, community institutions, private partners, and Covered Populations around the measurable objectives and key outcome areas. There are currently 33 members of the DEWG, including representatives from local government, state agencies, and community-based organizations.

Member	Organization
Peter Asen	RI HUD
Zoila Bernal	Community Libraries of Providence
Christopher Bourret	RI Department of Education
Lina Bravo	Providence Public Library
Natalie Chasse	RI Health Equity Zones
John Colantoni	Office of RI Governor McKee

Member	Organization
Megan Conway	East Bay CAP – Health Equity Zones
Claudia Cordon	Progreso Latino
Sarah Cote	OneCranston Health Equity Zone
Melly Cruz	City of Providence
Amanda DeGrace	Providence Housing Authority
Jayne DelSesto	RI Department of Corrections
Genesis Diaz	Genesis Center
Kate Felder	The Corporation
Kimberly Ferrante	Providence VA Medical Center
Ed Garcia	Cranston Public Libraries
Carmela Geer	King Edward House
Deborah Hall	RI HUD
Joanne Kerwin	Lifespan
Bethel Kibebe	RI HUD
Kate Michaud	Town of Warren
Matthew Netto	AARP
Debra Page-Trim	Town of Barrington
Nina Pande	Skills for RI’s Future
Kristen Read	Easy Bay CAP - Health Equity Zones
Olivia Read	The Corporation
Stephanie Shea	Community Libraries of Providence
Tommy Sheehan	Hi-Lo Neighborhood Association
Courtney Smith	United Way of RI
Cheryl Space	Community Libraries of Providence
Ivy Swinski	Com CAP
Jacob Tonseth	RI Community Food Bank
John Valletta	Ocean State Center for Independent Living

4.3.4 Broadband Advisory Council (BAC)

Created by the Rhode Island General Assembly, the BAC is a nine-member group designed to advise the Executive Office of Commerce and the Corporation on broadband implementation efforts undertaken by the agencies. It meets quarterly and reports annually to the General Assembly on its findings and recommendations, advises on broadband implementation efforts

undertaken by the agency, and invites telecommunications/IT experts and broadband stakeholders to inform the committee. The BAC provides written reports to the Speaker of the House and Senate President on the status of Rhode Island broadband efforts and the level and type of funding obligation and expenditure by awardee through any grant program. BAC members include representatives from private sector ISPs, nonprofit organizations, public housing authorities, and state agencies.

Member	Organization
Ernie Almonte	RI League of Cities and Towns
William Fazioli	RI Infrastructure Bank
Rhonda Mitchell	Newport Housing Authority
Mark Preston	Cox Communications
Armand Randolph	RI Emergency Management Agency
Gary Rebelo	Northern RI Boys and Girls Club
Deborah Ruggiero	DR Communications Group
Lauren Slocum	Central RI Chamber of Commerce
Brian Thorn, Chair	RI Commerce Corporation

4.3.5 Skills for Rhode Island's Future

A statewide workforce development nonprofit organization, Skills for Rhode Island's Future (SkillsRI) works to close the Rhode Island's workforce skills gap, drive business growth, and support unemployed or underemployed Rhode Islanders.

In 2022, SkillsRI spearheaded a process funded by the National Governor's Association to prepare a set of recommendations and incubated ideas to support the state's efforts to bridge the digital divide and create digital equity for all Rhode Islanders.

This effort included a core team comprising nonprofit and state leaders, including RI Commerce, and produced significant data and community input that have been integrated into the Rhode Island Digital Equity Plan.

4.3.6 Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns (the League)

The Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns (the League) is a non-partisan advocacy and membership organization representing all thirty-nine (39) municipalities across Rhode Island. The League represents municipal interests at the state level, fosters collaboration

between cities and towns, and provides critical resources to promote our members' success. Its members include mayors; elected officials; and municipal managers, administrators, and employees throughout Rhode Island. The League co-hosted the June 2023 Broadband Summit alongside the Corporation and the NTIA.

4.3.7 Public Comment

The Corporation is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders have the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Rhode Island Digital Equity Plan. From January 9 to February 8, the draft is being posted for public comment. During this time, the Corporation will continue its stakeholder outreach and engagement efforts to raise awareness of the public comment process. The Corporation will work with the Digital Equity Working Group and Broadband Advisory Council to inform stakeholder networks of the draft plan and public comment opportunity and conduct additional outreach through its extensive stakeholder email distribution list, social media channels, and a webinar.

A summary of the comments received will be available in the Appendix of the final plan.

4.4 ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

Rhode Island's foundation of inclusive stakeholder collaboration, engagement, and participatory planning will enable the Corporation to continue its stakeholder engagement efforts throughout plan implementation. Among statewide workshop participants, the majority of post-event survey respondents prefer receiving updates through emails and newsletters (67%), attending in-person workshops and events (63%), and attending

webinars (56%). Based on these data, the Corporation will continue its email newsletters and webinars, and partner with key digital equity groups to organize Digital Inclusion Week events annually.

As detailed in Chapter 5's Implementation Strategy, the Corporation plans to transition the DEWG to a statewide digital equity coalition, with expanded membership and representation from local networks of digital equity organizations, residents, and additional Covered Population-serving organizations. DEWG meetings and events will provide an open venue for the Corporation to share updates and collaborate with stakeholders on community input and continuous feedback during implementation. To maximize accessibility, meetings will be offered in hybrid formats with in-person and virtual options and will be held in various locations throughout the state to allow stakeholders to visit program sites.

This coalition will play an important role in aligning the Corporation's work with efforts emerging from stakeholders and digital equity organizations, which will support the implementation of this Plan and the development of Rhode Island's ecosystem.

Ongoing engagement will also be facilitated by state agencies, libraries, and other core digital equity institutions through their standard programming; statewide and regional bodies, including the coalition, will ensure that these activities keep the implementation of the Digital Equity Plan on track while collecting invaluable input from community members.

Community Stories



The Digital Equity Working Group shows **the power of partnership and collaboration** to serve our residents. One example: RI Commerce received a call from Celia at OneCranston HEZ asking for assistance in enrolling a resident in the Affordable Connectivity Program. For that, we contacted our partners at the Providence Public Library. Celia also had some housing-related questions for her resident, so we contacted our partners at Providence Housing Authority. Because of our active digital equity working group, one email got this resident set up with free internet service, all of her questions answered, and in-person assistance in her native language in less than 24 hours.

Thank you to all of our working group members for thoughtful, reliable service in our communities. This is how we go from talking about digital equity to making it so.



NTIA's Knowledge Build Hudson and Crystal Ivey at Broadband Summit in Newport, RI. | Credit: Rhode Island Commerce

5

Implementation

5.1 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY AND KEY ACTIVITIES

In anticipation of the State Capacity Grant Program NOFO, the Corporation is identifying key strategies to address Rhode Island's digital equity needs. With the current limited funding knowledge, the Corporation has identified strategies and activities that align with State's vision for equity and prosperity for all State residents (Rhode Island 2030) and the Learn365 Initiative. Our final implementation strategy will be based upon the funding award and its requirements (Note: the activities below are under consideration and will be prioritized and finalized after funding is announced).

The Corporation has identified key strategies and activities for achieving Rhode Island's digital equity objectives, addressing barriers experienced by Covered Populations and bridging gaps in current state and local efforts. Our plan aligns with the state's vision for equity and prosperity for all state residents (Rhode Island 2030), the Learn365 Initiative, and existing programs and local ecosystems. The Corporation will engage with state agencies, partner entities, and other organizations to implement this plan. As discussed in [Chapter 2.3.6](#), the Corporation will also continue to engage in consultation with the Narragansett Indian Tribe on how the state and the Tribe can collaborate on digital equity implementation.

Through the Digital Equity Act, Rhode Island will receive a State Digital Equity Capacity Grant to support the implementation of these strategies. The Corporation will refine and finalize these strategies and activities after the federal Capacity Grant awards and requirements have been announced.

Summary of Strategies and Core Activities

STRATEGY	CORE ACTIVITIES
<p>Strategy 1: Create and align opportunities for Rhode Islanders to obtain the digital skills necessary to achieve our state’s priorities.</p>	<p>1.1. Provide technical assistance for digital skills integration into workforce training, education, small business support, and Covered Population-serving systems statewide.</p> <p>1.2. Invest in existing Covered Population-serving ecosystems to ensure all geographic regions (five counties) have access to comprehensive digital inclusion services.</p> <p>1.3. Incorporate online privacy and cybersecurity skill-building in all digital inclusion services.</p> <p>1.4. Explore new family-sustaining career opportunities for Covered Population residents to deliver digital inclusion services.</p>
<p>Strategy 2: Increase access to affordable, high-quality, large-screen, internet-enabled devices and technical support for those devices that meets residents’ needs.</p>	<p>2.1. Identify and support partner organizations to provide devices, preparation and refurbishment, and help desk and technical support.</p> <p>2.2. Deploy devices through Covered Population-serving organizations and networks.</p>
<p>Strategy 3: Build partnerships and coordinate funding for affordable high-quality broadband service for Covered Populations.</p>	<p>3.1. Explore the use of broadband infrastructure funds and other state funding sources to provide a statewide affordable housing broadband program.</p> <p>3.2. Coordinate with RIDOC on efforts to bring connectivity to the state’s correctional facilities.</p> <p>3.3. Explore funding to sustain ACP or other affordable broadband options.</p>
<p>Strategy 4: Leverage digital equity ecosystem to support Rhode Island’s Ongoing Digital Government Initiatives.</p>	<p>4.1. Integrate online public resource assistance and feedback into digital inclusion services.</p>
<p>Strategy 5: Plan for long-term sustainability and continuity of services.</p>	<p>5.1. Sustain and expand the state’s Digital Equity Working Group, transforming it into a coalition to advance digital equity for Rhode Islanders.</p> <p>5.2. Leverage partnerships to integrate digital equity activities within existing regional, local, and statewide programs and initiatives.</p> <p>5.3. Evaluate digital equity programs for impact on state priorities.</p>



STRATEGY 1:

Create and align opportunities for Rhode Islanders to obtain the digital skills necessary to achieve our state's priorities.

More digital skill training opportunities are necessary for achieving the state's priorities. Individuals with disabilities and aging individuals have the need for trainings on topics such as utilizing accessibility features on their devices or setting up and using smart home technologies to support independent living, while veterans can benefit from group trainings for peer-to-peer support and help navigating online VA benefits. Multiple Covered Populations and stakeholder groups, especially aging individuals, parents, and employers, expressed the need for more training on online privacy and cybersecurity protections. Across the board, stakeholders have expressed the need for trainings to include:

- Flexible hours and methods of delivery (including 1-on-1 training and home-based support).
- Curriculum that is culturally relevant, in multiple languages, and inclusive of assistive technology and accessibility features.
- A diverse range of skill-building with pathways from basic to advanced skills for employment, education, and small business opportunities.
- Online privacy and cybersecurity measures, especially for aging individuals and parents.

The Corporation's strategy is to support and invest in existing Covered Population-serving ecosystems and educational and workforce development programs to ensure individuals have the digital skills needed to achieve their goals.

Objective and KPIs Addressed:

Objective 1: Digital Skills and Online Safety—ensure all Rhode Island Covered Populations have the skills and support needed to utilize technology effectively and safely to improve their quality of life, access economic opportunities, and achieve their goals.

KPIs:

- Number of highest-need Covered Population residents trained in digital skills programs for foundational skills.
- Number of programs providing training on digital skills related to state priorities such as health, education, and workforce development.
- Number of training programs for online privacy and cybersecurity.

CORE ACTIVITIES

1.1. Provide technical assistance for digital skills integration into workforce training, education, small business support, and Covered Population-serving systems statewide.

The Corporation will evaluate the development of a technical assistance program to help the public secondary education system, workforce development organizations, housing providers, and Covered Population-serving organizations integrate digital skills training into their services. The Corporation will also integrate digital skills training into its existing technical assistance programs that support small businesses, including those designed to support Covered Population-owned businesses,

Partners to engage:

- Adult education providers
- Community-based organizations serving Covered Populations
- Labor organizations
- Postsecondary education institutions
- Public and affordable housing providers
- Public libraries
- School districts
- Small business support organizations
- Workforce agencies and organizations
- Government Agencies (e.g. DLT and DHS)

1.2. Invest in existing Covered Population-serving ecosystems to ensure all geographic regions (five counties) have access to comprehensive digital inclusion services.

Rhode Island has a rich ecosystem of organizations and programs serving Covered Populations with digital inclusion services. These organizations are trusted by community members and offer programs for digital equity within a broader set of wraparound services.

The Corporation will design a plan to support organizations across all five counties to help increase their capacity, reach, effectiveness, and range of digital inclusion services, including digital navigation, foundational digital skill building, on-ramping to advanced digital skills and credentialing programs, and access to devices. To address stakeholder concerns and gaps in existing services, these services will be designed to include flexible hours and methods of delivery, culturally competent curriculum that is available in multiple languages, and a diverse range of skill-building from basic to advanced skills, including the use of assistive technology and accessibility features.

Partners to engage:

- Adult education providers
- Community-based organizations serving Covered Populations
- Health Equity Zones
- Public libraries
- Workforce agencies and organizations

1.3. Incorporate online privacy and cybersecurity skill-building in digital inclusion services.

Responding to the needs of Rhode Islanders, especially aging individuals and parents within Covered Populations, trainings on online privacy and cybersecurity will be incorporated throughout Rhode Island’s digital equity ecosystem.

Partners to engage:

- All partners engaged through Activities 1.1 and 1.2.

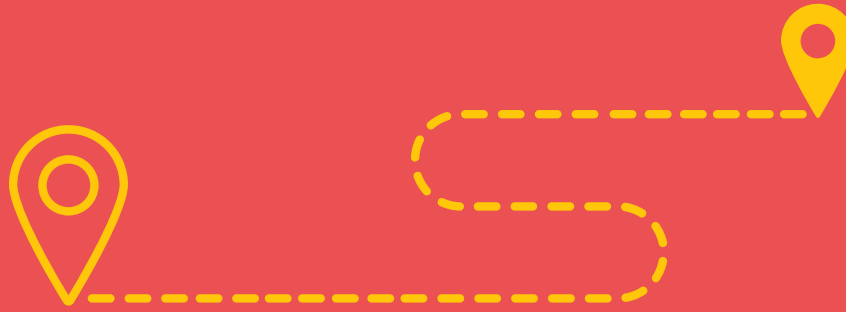
1.4. Explore new family-sustaining career opportunities for Covered Population residents to deliver digital inclusion services.

The Corporation will coordinate among digital inclusion service providers, workforce development organizations, labor organizations, career and technical education, and postsecondary education systems to identify potential opportunities to train and prepare Covered Population residents to serve in roles such as digital navigators, digital skill trainers, device refurbishers, technical support and repair specialists, and broadband technicians.

This approach expands Rhode Island’s technology talent pipeline by providing IT training, credentialing, and career opportunities to Covered Population residents, while also increasing trust within the communities they serve.

Partners to engage:

- All partners engaged through Activities 1.1 and 1.2.
- Career and technical education programs (including those at high schools)
- Labor organizations
- ISPs



STRATEGY 2:

Increase access to affordable, high-quality large-screen internet enabled devices and technical support that meets residents' needs.

Devices play a vital role in digital equity, enabling individuals to fully participate in the modern economy and to harness the benefits of broadband connectivity. As detailed in [Chapter 3](#), multiple Covered Populations have significantly lower home computer access rates and much higher rates of having smartphones as their only computing device, impacting their ability to participate in vital services such as online classes, telehealth, and applying for employment. The largest barrier is the affordability of devices and repairs. While the Asset Inventory identified numerous organizations that offer computer and device access, these programs are largely designed for public device access or device lending.

More support is required to achieve the goal of 95% of Rhode Islanders owning a working, large-screen, internet-capable computer that meets their needs, especially among Covered Populations, adult education, postsecondary education, and digital skills training participants.

The Corporation will support Rhode Island organizations in developing a device ecosystem that is sustainable and leverages locally available resources and expertise. The device activities will be tailored to meet the needs of Covered Population residents, including provision of high-quality, large-screen, internet-capable devices that are paired accessible technical support.

Objective and KPIs Addressed:

Objective 2: Device Access—prioritize Covered Populations to achieve a goal of 95% of Rhode Island residents owning an affordable, high-quality, large-screen, internet-enabled device that meets their needs.

KPIs:

- **Number of Covered Population-serving programs that provide devices and device technical support.**
- **% of Covered Population residents who own a large-screen, internet-enabled device.**

CORE ACTIVITIES

2.1. Identify and support partner organizations to provide devices, preparation and refurbishment, and help desk and technical support.

The Corporation will develop a plan for identifying, supporting, and investing in Rhode Island organizations that can serve as device partners to source, prepare, deliver, and support new and refurbished devices. Device partners can help manage each stage of the device lifecycle and integrate workforce development into their operations, in alignment with Activity 1.4.

To implement this activity, the Corporation will look to involve organizations already offering IT training and credentialing, such as workforce development organizations, the postsecondary education system, and career and technical education programs.

Partners to engage:

- Businesses
- Career and technical education programs (including those at high schools)
- Postsecondary education institutions
- Organizations specializing in technology, devices, and customer and technical support
- RI Department of Labor and Training
- Workforce agencies and organizations
- Government Agencies with workforce development programs (e.g. DLT & DHS)

2.2. Deploy devices through Covered Population-serving organizations and networks.

With the Corporation's support, device partners will coordinate device deployment with organizations serving Covered Populations and those offering other digital inclusion services throughout Rhode Island. Deployment partners will ensure devices are received and effectively utilized by residents who need them most. The Corporation plans to prioritize device deployment to support digital skills training and the state's goals in education, workforce development, health, and housing.

Partners to engage:

- All partners engaged through Strategy 1 (digital skills partners).
- All partners engaged through Activity 2.1 (device partners).



STRATEGY 3:

Build partnerships and coordinate funding for affordable high-quality broadband service for Covered Populations.

Rhode Island’s BEAD and CPF allocations are the primary mechanisms for funding broadband expansion to unserved and underserved locations and community anchor institutions throughout the state. However, the Corporation recognizes the need for affordable, reliable, and high-quality broadband for **all Rhode Islanders**, especially Covered Populations, even for those

not technically classified as living in unserved or underserved locations. To improve broadband affordability and quality for **all Rhode Islanders**, the Corporation plans to seek out additional funding sources that could be used to expand promising broadband initiatives and sustain broadband affordability benefits.

Objective and KPIs Addressed:

Objective 3: Broadband—provide universal access to affordable, reliable broadband service and close broadband adoption gaps in Covered Population communities.

KPIs:

- Number of unserved and underserved locations connected to broadband (through BEAD).
- Number of CAIs connected to gigabit internet (through BEAD).
- Number of public and affordable housing properties and correctional facilities connected to broadband.
- % of eligible residents enrolling in ACP or other affordable broadband benefit.
- Number of ISPs providing low-cost service plans.

CORE ACTIVITIES

3.1. Explore the use of broadband infrastructure funds and other state funding sources to provide a statewide affordable housing broadband program.

Building upon Newport Housing Authority and Hi-Lo Neighborhood Association's successful model noted in Chapter 3, the Corporation will design a plan for providing free or low-cost broadband to Rhode Island's public housing residents. According to data from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), over 14,000 Rhode Islanders live in public housing in about 9,000 housing units, with most residents belonging to one or more Covered Populations. For example, 71% of households are extremely low-income, 55% include aging individuals, 46% are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and 29% of residents have a disability. An additional 22,000 Rhode Islanders live in project-based Section 8 housing, with similar demographics.

The Newport Housing model offers an effective and efficient approach for addressing the broadband affordability needs of covered households and other Covered Populations served by public housing at scale. The Corporation will explore the use of broadband infrastructure funds and other state funding sources to replicate the model statewide.

Partners to engage:

- Federal, state, and municipal funders
- ISPs
- Philanthropy
- Public and affordable housing providers
- Tenant associations

3.2. Coordinate with RIDOC on efforts to bring connectivity to the state's correctional facilities.

The Corporation will coordinate with RIDOC to explore leveraging Rhode Island's broadband infrastructure investments for connectivity at RIDOC facilities to increase access for incarcerated individuals.

Partners to engage:

- ISPs
- RIDOC

3.3. Explore funding to sustain ACP or other affordable broadband options.

While the Corporation has made significant strides in increasing enrollment, the federal ACP benefit currently lacks a long-term funding source. The Corporation will explore state, federal, philanthropic, and private funding sources to help ensure Rhode Islanders will continue to have affordable broadband options.

Partners to engage:

- Federal, state, and municipal funders
- ISPs
- Philanthropy



STRATEGY 4:

Leverage digital equity ecosystem to support Rhode Island’s Ongoing Digital Government Initiatives.

As more government services and processes are delivered online, Covered Population-serving organizations and residents have cited accessibility gaps, including difficulties with navigating applications for public benefits or participating in online public meetings. At the same time, the benefits in terms of convenience and efficiency of online government services are widely recognized, as long as these services are well-designed and accompanied by in-person support.

“Moving State Government into 2030” is a Rhode Island 2030 priority, with the state undergoing careful planning to modernize and digitalize government services to make it easier for Rhode Islanders to access resources and interact with government online. To align with this effort, the Corporation will leverage the digital equity ecosystem to coordinate in-person support and feedback mechanisms.

Objective and KPIs Addressed:

Objective 4: Online Accessibility—ensure essential public resources and services have online accessibility, language access, and usability for Covered Populations.

KPIs:

- **Number of user-testing groups held with Covered Populations.**
- **Usability ratings for online public services among Covered Populations.**
- **% of state government websites meeting the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standard.**

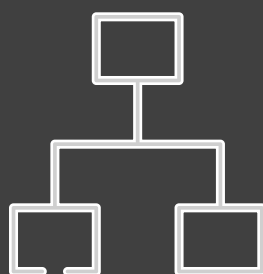
CORE ACTIVITIES

4.1. Integrate online public resource assistance and feedback into digital inclusion services.

The Corporation will leverage digital inclusion partners engaged through Strategies 1 and 2 for improving access to online public resources. Digital inclusion partners will be equipped to assist community members with navigating key online public resources and applications. The Corporation will also develop a mechanism for partners to submit feedback from Covered Population residents to improve the accessibility of online public resources.

Partners to engage:

- All partners engaged through Strategy 1 (digital skills partners)
- All partners engaged through Strategy 2 (device partners)



STRATEGY 5:

Plan for long-term sustainability and continuity of services

Throughout the planning process, numerous stakeholders have named the lack of sustainability of digital equity programs as a significant gap in prior efforts. With the federal State Digital Equity Capacity Grant

program designed for a five-year funding period, the Corporation has identified the following activities to help ensure digital equity programs can be sustained in the long term.

Objective and KPIs Addressed:

All

CORE ACTIVITIES

5.1. Sustain and expand the state’s Digital Equity Working Group, transforming it into a coalition to advance digital equity for Rhode Islanders.

The Digital Equity Working Group (DEWG) formed during the state’s digital equity planning process has grown to 33 members representing a diverse set of organizations and stakeholders.

The Corporation will transform the DEWG into a coalition that engages all stakeholders working to advance digital equity in Rhode Island. The DEWG will provide a venue for collaboration and partnership, community input on digital

equity programs, and promotion of new funding opportunities (including the upcoming federal Digital Equity Competitive Grant program). The Corporation will continually review, evaluate, and expand representation, with a focus on ensuring an inclusive process that results in a diversity of individual, organizational, and sector representation.

5.2. Leverage partnerships to integrate digital equity activities within existing regional, local, and statewide programs and initiatives.

The Corporation will identify new potential partners to integrate digital equity activities into community-based and Covered Population-serving programming, private sector efforts, and across government to grow the digital equity ecosystem. In particular, the Corporation will explore options with other state agencies and philanthropy for adding digital skills training, digital navigation, and device components to their existing grants and funding strategies.

5.3. Evaluate digital equity programs for impact on state priorities.

Strategies throughout this plan have been designed to address the digital divide and help Rhode Islanders advance in state priority areas, such as economic and workforce development, education, and health. As Digital Equity Plan strategies and activities are implemented, the Corporation will evaluate their effectiveness and impact on state priority outcomes, such as improved employment or educational outcomes among recipients of digital inclusion services. If these programs are found to be effective, evaluation results will shape the state's ongoing investments in digital equity and ensure their sustainability.

5.2 TIMELINE

The preliminary timeline is below. The Corporation will update the timeline when more information is received by the NTIA on Rhode Island's allocation from the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant program.

The Corporation is committed to maximizing digital equity in the state and will engage in on-going monitoring and evaluation of its plan, with a formal evaluation of KPI's annually. Any identified enhancements and/or modifications to programming and timing will be made with stakeholder and public input and are subject to NTIA approval.

2024: Quarter 1

- Release Initial Draft of Rhode Island's Digital Equity Plan for 30-day public comment period.
- Engage stakeholders to provide feedback on the Plan through public comment.
- Continue collecting Digital Equity Public Survey and Asset Mapping Survey responses.
- Revise Plan based on public comment and survey results.
- Submit Final Plan to NTIA for approval.
- Continue DEWG meetings (Activity 5.1).

2024: Quarter 2

- **State Capacity Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity is released by NTIA along with RI's Capacity Grant allocation. (tentative – dependent on NTIA)**
- Finalize planned strategies and activities based on the allocation and award requirements.
- Submit application for Capacity Grant funding.

2024: Quarter 3

- Begin planning and partner engagement for each strategy.
- Begin planning and coordination on broadband strategies (Strategy 3).
- Monitor ACP program funding and explore alternatives (Activity 3.3).
- Develop monitoring and evaluation plan for evaluating digital equity programs and grantees (Activity 5.3).

2024: Quarter 4

- Receive Capacity Grant award.
- Develop Request for Proposals (or other procurement mechanism) for digital skills training (Strategy 1) and device partners (Strategy 2).
- Release 2025-2026 RFP.

2025: Quarter 1

- Select partners funded through 2025-2026 RFP for digital skills training and devices.
- Identify additional device deployment partners (Activity 2.2).
- Partners begin program implementation, including offering online public resource support (Activity 4.2).

2025: Quarter 2 – Quarter 3

- Finalize plan for affordable housing broadband program (Activity 3.1).

2025: Quarter 4

- Produce annual progress report with Year 1 evaluation results. Update the plan if necessary (Activity 5.3).
- Begin coordination for embedding digital equity in more programs and initiatives and additional funding (Activity 5.2).

2026 – 2028

- Continue implementation of all strategies.
- Release 2027-2029 RFP and select funded partners.
- Produce annual progress reports with Year 2 – Year 4 evaluation results. Update the plan if necessary (Activity 5.3).
- Plan for post Capacity Grant program sustainability.

2029

- Continue implementation of all strategies.
- Produce annual progress report with Year 5 evaluation results (Activity 5.3).
- Transition Capacity Grant-funded programs to other funding sources.
- Close out State Capacity Grant.

Major Milestones

- Final Plan submission to NTIA: Mar 2024
- Application submitted for Capacity Grant funding: May 2024
- Capacity Grant Award received: Oct 2024
- 2025-2026 RFP released for digital skills and device partners: Nov 2024
- 2025-2026 RFP selections announced: Jan 2025
- Digital skills and device strategy implementation: Jan 2025 – Sep 2029
- Finalize plan for affordable housing broadband program: Apr 2025
- 2027-2029 RFP released for digital skills and device partners: Sep 2026
- 2027-2029 RFP selections announced: Nov 2026
- Annual evaluation results showing progress made across all objectives and potential plan updates:
 - Year 1: Dec 2025
 - Year 2: Dec 2026
 - Year 3: Dec 2027
 - Year 4: Dec 2028
 - Year 5: Dec 2029
- State Capacity Grant closeout: Sep 2029



6

Conclusion

The Corporation is grateful for the input and participation of organizations and community members during this planning process. This Digital Equity Plan provides a blueprint to address the state’s digital equity gaps and needs. The Corporation looks forward to working with **all Rhode Islanders** to implement this plan and achieve digital equity in the Ocean State.



7

Appendices

- **Appendix A:** Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey organizational respondents
- **Appendix B:** List of organizations engaged through meetings and events
- **Appendix C:** Survey instruments
- **Appendix D:** Event collateral
- **Appendix E:** Public Comments (to be added in the final version of the Plan)

APPENDIX A: DIGITAL EQUITY ASSET MAPPING SURVEY ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONDENTS

As of January 2024

Adams Public Library	Cumberland Public Library
AHEPA 245-II Apartments	Davisville Free Library
Amos House	Direct Action For Rights And Equality
Aquidneck Island Planning Commission	Dorcas International Institute
Aquidneck Light	East Smithfield Public Library
Ashaway Free Library	Elmhurst School
Barrington Public Library	Family Services of RI
Barrington Public Schools	Genesis Center
Blackstone Valley Community Action Program (BVCAP)	George Hail Free Library
Bristol Warren Regional School District	Greenbush Elementary School
Broad Rock Middle School	Greenville Public Library
Brownell Library	Hazard School
Care New England Health System	HCH Enterprises
CHR Solutions	Hi-Lo Neighborhood Association
City of Newport, RI	Howard Hathaway School
Clark Memorial Library	HUD
Community College Of Rhode Island	Institute for Labor Studies and Research
Community Libraries of Providence	Institute for Local Self-Reliance
Coventry Public Library	Jamestown Housing Authority
Coventry Public Schools	Jamestown Philomenian Library
Cranston Adult Education Programs	John F. Derring Middle School
Cranston Public Library	John F. Horgan Elementary School
Cross Mills Public Library	Johnston Housing Authority
Crossroads Rhode Island - Family Shelter & Domestic Violence Program	Lincoln Public Library

LPI Cabling	Rhode Island College Workforce Development Hub
Maisie E. Quinn Elementary School	Rhode Island Commerce Corporation
Maloney Properties Inc. (Agent for Neighborworks Blackstone River Valley)	Rhode Island EMA
Matunuck Elementary School	Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging
Melville Elementary School	Rhode Island Regional Adult Learning
Middletown Public Library	RI AREC Foundation
Middletown Town Hall	RI Department of Corrections
Mobile Beacon	RI League of Cities and Towns
Newport Housing Authority	RI Office of Healthy Aging
North Providence School Department	RIDE state team
North Providence Union Free Library	Rogers Free Library
North Smithfield Public Library	Scituate School Department
Norwood Branch	SOHO Business Enterprises
Ocean State Libraries	South Kingstown Administrative Building
Office of Library and Information Services	South Kingstown High School
ONE Neighborhood Builders	South Kingstown Public Library
OSHEAN, Inc.	Town of Barrington
Pawtucket Adult Education	Town of Hopkinton
Peace Dale Elementary	Town of Middletown
Peace Dale Library	Town of Portsmouth
Pontiac Free Library	Town of Warren
Portsmouth Free Public Library	Town of Westerly
Portsmouth High School	Tri-County Community Action Agency
Portsmouth Middle School	Turning Around Ministries
Preservation of Affordable Housing	Verizon
Providence College	Wakefield Hills Elementary School
Providence Housing Authority	Warren Health Equity Zone
Providence Public Library	Warwick Public Library

West Warwick Public Library	Willett Free Library
West Warwick Senior High School	Winslow Gardens
Westbay Community Action	Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Westerly Library & Wilcox Park	

APPENDIX B: LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED THROUGH MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Organizations engaged through the ConnectRI Broadband Summit, Statewide Digital Equity Workshops, and other meetings and events during the digital equity planning process.

AARP	DOC (Department of Corrections)
AccessPoint RI	Donovan House Federally Funded Housing
AHEPA Senior Living	East Bay Community Action Program
Aquidneck Island Planning Commission	East Providence Public Library
ATEL Program	Emergency Management Agency
Bristol Warren Regional School District	Farm Fresh RI
Brownell Library	Fox Point Manor Nursing Home
City of Cranston	Genesis Center
City of East Providence	Greater Newport Chamber of Commerce
City of Newport	Greenville Public Library
City of Providence	Health Equity Zones
Community College of Rhode Island	Hilcrest Village Federally Funded Housing
Community Libraries of Providence	HUD
Councilwoman AnderBois	I3
Councilwoman Peterson	Indelible Solutions
Councilwoman Roias	Innovation Studio
Cox Communications	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)
Cranston Public Library	Jamestown Housing Authority
Cranston Senior Center	Justice Assistance
Crossroads Rhode Island	Leon Mathieu Senior Center
Crown Castle	Medicaid
Department of Labor and Training	MET School
Digitunity	Mission Broadband

New England Connectivity & Telecom Assoc	Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative (out of Providence Public Library)
Newport Chamber of Commerce	Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns
Newport Housing Authority	Rhode Island Office of Library & Information Services
NTIA	Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RI OPC)
OATS (Older Adults Technology Services)	Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission (RIPUC)
Ocean State Center for Independent Living	Rhode Island Society of Technology Educators (RISTE)
Ocean State Libraries	RI Housing
Office for Healthy Aging	Salve Regina University
ONE Neighborhood Builders	Sertex Broadband Solutions
OSHEAN	Smithfield Library
PACE RI	South Kingston Schools
Progreso Latino	Town of Barrington
Providence American Job Center	Town of Burrillville
Providence Housing Authority	Town of Exeter
Providence Promise	Town of Hopkinton RI
Providence Public Library	Town of Little Compton
Providence Veteran Center	Town of Middletown
Prudence Island School	Town of New Shoreham
Public Utilities Commission	Town of Portsmouth
R.I. Office of Healthy Aging	Town of Warren
Rhode Island Center for Justice (CFJ)	Town of Westerly
Rhode Island Commerce Corporation	Turning Around Ministries
Rhode Island Community Food Bank	United Way
Rhode Island Department of Education	URI Cyber Seniors
Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training	US Dept of Housing and Urban Development

US Senator Jack Reed	Washington Park Library
Varsnet Inc	West End Community Center
Verizon Communications	West End Food Pantry
Veterans of Foreign Wars, Rhode Island Department	West End Revival Women's Group
Walcott Associates	Westbay
Ward 12	Woonsocket Education Department

APPENDIX C: SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

Rhode Island Statewide Digital Equity Public Survey

Link: <http://bit.ly/connectri-de-survey>

Rhode Island’s ConnectRI team wants to hear from you about your experiences with getting and using internet service. Your input will help the State make sure that everyone can have access to high-quality and affordable internet service, devices, skills training, and digital support. The survey is completely anonymous. Questions are optional, unless specified otherwise. You may skip all optional questions.

We do not ask for any personally identifiable information (e.g., name, email, address). We collect demographic information so that we can make sure we are representing all neighborhoods, towns, cities and demographic groups across Rhode Island, and to enable municipal planning efforts as well as statewide planning. Data from this survey will be retained for one year following the approval of the State’s Digital Equity Plan, then destroyed.

*Questions are required.

Part 1: Eligibility

Are you 18 or over? *

Yes

No

Are you a resident of Rhode Island? *

Yes

No

Part 2: Availability and Affordability

1. What is your zip code?

2. Do you have internet service in your home?

Yes

No

If you DO have internet service at home, please answer these questions. If you DO NOT have internet service at home, please skip to Question 8.

3. What kind of internet service do you have at home? (Select all that apply)

A data plan for a smartphone, hotspot, or tablet

Home wireline connection (cable, fiber, DSL, etc.)

Dial-up internet

- Satellite internet
 - No internet service of any kind
 - I don't know
4. How well does your home internet service work?
- Good enough to meet my household's needs
 - Not good enough to meet my household's needs
 - I don't know
5. Is your home internet service bundled with other services such as telephone or TV?
- Yes
 - No
6. **a) (If your internet service is bundled with other services)** Not counting the costs of other services in your bundle, how much do you pay for the internet every month?
- \$_____ Answer
- b) (If your internet service is NOT bundled with other services)** How much do you pay for the internet every month?
- \$_____ Answer
7. Is your internet service affordable?
- Not affordable at all
 - Not affordable
 - Affordable
 - Very affordable

If you DO NOT have internet service at home, please answer Question 8.
If you DO have internet service at home, please skip to Question 9.

8. **a) If you do not have internet service in your home, what is the reason?** (Select all that apply)
- Service is not available in my area
 - Service is too expensive
 - Installation fee is too expensive
 - I am concerned about online privacy or safety
 - I don't feel confident navigating the internet or using online tools
 - I can't afford or don't have access to a device to use the internet

I don't want / don't use the internet.

Other (please specify) _____

b) If you do not have internet at home, where do you go to use the internet?
(Select all that apply)

A workplace

A friend or family member's home

School, college, or university

Library

Community center

Senior Center

Local business, such as a restaurant, cafe, or bookstore (e.g., McDonald's, Taco Bell, Starbucks, etc.)

A public space such as a park or government building

On public transit

I do not regularly access internet in these or any other spaces

9. Have you heard about the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) that provides discounted internet service for low-income households?

Yes

No

I don't know

Part 3: Device availability, affordability, and technical support

10. Does everyone in your household have access to the computer devices they need to meet their everyday needs for internet use? (Computers, smartphones, tablets, or other internet enabled devices)?

Yes

No

11. Which of the following devices do you use most of the time to connect to the internet? (Select all that apply)

Cellphone

Desktop computer

Laptop computer

Tablet (or similar device)

Other type of device (please specify)_____

12. How much would you be able to pay for a laptop or desktop computer?

- \$0-50
- \$50-100
- \$100-150
- \$150-250
- \$250-500
- \$500-1,000
- More than \$1,000

13. If you have trouble with computers or the internet, is there someone in your household or community who can help you? (Select all that apply)

- Yes, I can get help from someone in my household
- Yes, I can get help from someone in my community (such as a friend, neighbor, community-based organization, librarian)
- Yes, I can get help from a paid service in my community
- No
- I don't know

Part 4: Digital Skills

14. Are you able to regularly use the internet for online activities?

- Yes
- No

15. How confident do you feel with doing the following activities online?
(Completely confident / Fairly confident / Slightly confident / Not confident)

	Completely Confident	Fairly Confident	Slightly Confident	Not Confident
Searching and applying for a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health care or telehealth services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participating in your local community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General internet searching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Completely Confident	Fairly Confident	Slightly Confident	Not Confident
Transportation information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Searching and/or applying for benefits or resources for you and your family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Completing homework or taking continuing education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

b) If you **do not** have regular access to the internet, what would most like to use it for if you could? (Select all that apply)

- Searching and applying for a job
- Health care or telehealth services
- Participating in your local community
- General internet searching
- Transportation information
- Searching and/or applying for benefits or resources for you and your family
- Completing homework or taking continuing education
- Something else
- I don't want to use the internet regularly

16. What kind of digital skills support would you be most interested in? (Select all that apply)

- In person classes
- Online classes
- In person support from a friend or instructor
- A do-it-yourself training module

Part 5: Internet Safety

17. How concerned are you about internet safety?

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Not very concerned
- Not at all concerned

18. What are you most concerned about? (Select all that apply)
- That my data could get stolen or used without my consent
 - That I or a loved one could get scammed or tricked
 - That I could be tracked or surveilled
 - That I or a loved one could be harassed or abused online
 - N/A – Not concerned at all
 - Other (please specify) _____
19. Are you aware of tools or resources you can use to stay safe online?
- Yes, I have tools and resources I use to stay safe online
 - No, I don't know of any tools or resources to stay safe online
 - I know of tools or resources to stay safe online, but they don't work for me
 - Other (please specify) _____

Part 6: Accessibility

20. How accessible are online government services like benefits portals, DMV services, or paying for permits or tickets to you?
- Very accessible
 - Somewhat accessible
 - Not very accessible
 - Not at all accessible
21. When you have used online government services like benefits portals, DMV services, or paying for permits or tickets, how well did they work for you?
- Very well
 - Somewhat well
 - Not too well
 - Not well at all

Part 7: Demographic Questions

22. What is your age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 59
- 60 to 74
- 75 or older
- Prefer not to answer

23. What is your gender identity?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Gender fluid
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

24. How many people, including yourself, currently live in your household? (Note: A household is defined as all the people who currently occupy the housing unit where you live).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8 or more
- Prefer not to answer

25. How many children under age 18, currently live in your household? (Note: A household is defined as all the people who currently occupy the housing unit where you live).
- 0
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 or more
 - Prefer not to answer
26. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- Less than high school, or high school incomplete (Up to grades 9-11 or Grade 12 with NO diploma)
 - High school graduate (Grade 12 with diploma or GED certificate)
 - Two-year associate degree from a college or university
 - Four-year college or university degree/Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA, AB)
 - Postgraduate or professional degree, including master's, doctorate, medical or law degree (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD)
 - Prefer not to answer
27. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban?
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to answer
28. Which of the following best describes your race? (Select all that apply)
- White or Caucasian
 - Black or African-American
 - Asian or Asian-American
 - Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native
 - Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian
 - Some other race (please specify) _____
 - Prefer not to answer

29. Do you belong to a North American Indigenous, Native, or Tribal group?
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to answer
30. What is your total annual household income from all sources, and before taxes?
- Less than \$22,000
 - \$22,000 to \$29,999
 - \$30,000 to \$36,999
 - \$37,000 to \$44,999
 - \$45,000 to \$52,999
 - \$53,000 to \$59,999
 - \$60,000 or more
 - Prefer not to answer
31. Do you identify as a person with a disability? (Note: Disability is defined as physical, emotional, or mental health conditions that result in limitations of activities or restrictions to full participation at school, at work, at home, or in the community).
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to answer
32. (If yes to Question 31 above) Do you have difficulty in any of the following areas? (Select all that apply)
- Seeing even if wearing glasses
 - Hearing even if using a hearing aid
 - Walking or climbing steps
 - Remembering or concentrating
 - Self-care
 - Communicating, for example understanding or being understood
 - Prefer not to answer
33. Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community?
- Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to answer

34. Did you serve on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces? (Select all that apply)

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

35. In what Rhode Island city or town do you live?* _____

36. Do you live in affordable housing? (Note: Affordable housing is defined as housing subsidized by a housing authority, paid for through a voucher, or in a building run by a private developer.)

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- Prefer not to answer

THANK YOU!

Thank you for taking the survey! Your response will help shape Rhode Island's policies and investments to close the digital divide for all residents.

ConnectRI works to ensure all Rhode Islanders have access to affordable, accessible high-speed internet in their homes, at their places of employment, and at public facilities by 2027. Learn more about our mission and work at connectri-ricom.hub.arcgis.com.

Rhode Island Digital Equity Asset Mapping Survey

Link: <https://connectri-ricom.hub.arcgis.com/pages/c4d9b745652c46bb8bd2bd33bf861769>

We are collecting data to determine what organizations in Rhode Island may be eligible for support from one of our programs. As part of this effort, we need input from all government agencies, nonprofits, experts, practitioners, funders, researchers and community organizers. If your work helps people in your community access the internet, computers or digital skills training, or other information and resources, you should take part in this survey.

*Questions are required.

1. What is the name of your organization?* _____
2. What is the address of your organization?* _____
3. Does your organization have more than one location?
 - Yes
 - No
4. Please provide a point of contact in your organization.* _____
(Enter your name or another POC in your organization.)
5. What is main number for your organization?* _____
(Please enter area code followed by 7 digit telephone number. Numbers only.)
6. What is your phone number?* _____
(Please enter area code followed by 7 digit telephone number. Numbers only.)
7. What is your email?* _____
(Enter your work email address.)
8. Website URL* _____
9. Which of the following best describes your organization?
 - Career/Tech Center
 - Community-support or community-based organization
 - Correctional Facility
 - Federal Government
 - Foundation/Philanthropic
 - Higher Education
 - Health Facility

- Hospital
- Housing Authority
- Internet Equipment Provider
- Internet Service Provider
- School (K-12)
- Subsidy Program
- Library
- Local Government
- Nonprofit
- Private Sector
- Public Safety Entity
- State Government
- Tribal Government
- Other

Community Anchor Institutions

10. What type of coverage does your organization's programs or services provide?*

- Statewide
- County-wide or across multiple counties
- City-wide or across multiple cities
- Specific to a Tribe or available to multiple Tribes
- Neighborhood-based or across multiple neighborhoods
- Other

11. Target Population(s):* Historically underserved groups toward whom the organization/program focuses its digital inclusion services (check all that apply).

- English Language Learners
- Immigrants or Refugees
- Incarcerated Persons
- Low-Income Households
- Members of Racial or Ethnic Minority Groups
- Older Adults

- Persons with Disabilities
- Persons with Low Literacy Levels
- Rural Residents
- Veterans
- Youth

12. Which of the following types of digital equity programs does your organization provide?* (Please select all that apply.)

- Broadband Access and Affordability (please select this option if you promote or provide access to any of the following: Information or enrollment assistance for subsidy programs such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), Lifeline/Tribal Lifeline, hotspots, and internet service)
- Broadband adoption programs
- Digital literacy grants
- Digital Skills and Technical Support
- Digital Equity Program Funding
- Digital Equity Research, Planning, or Organizing
- Grant Programs
- Workforce development programs
- I don't know
- Other

13. What types of digital inclusion services does your organization provide?* Categories of digital inclusion services for which the organization/program delivers services (check all that apply).

- Broadband Access & Affordability
- Device Access
- Digital Inclusion Funding
- Digital Skills & Technical Support
- Printer Access
- Public Device & Internet Access
- Telehealth Services/Support
- I don't know
- Other

14. Does your organization's location have access to gigabit speed broadband service?* Gigabit-capable broadband is a connection that is able to deliver speeds of 1000Mbps or more (1 Gbps).

Yes

No

I don't know

15. Additional Input: If your company would like to provide additional input that the State should consider about broadband access and affordability programs in the development of the Statewide Digital Equity Plan, please share your perspective here.

Rhode Island Internet Connectivity Survey

Link: <https://connectri-ricom.hub.arcgis.com/pages/1bc1241dd84a4a69bc8c4a87ab857a7f>

The Rhode Island Internet Connectivity Survey is designed to gather information on locations in the state without adequate internet access and speeds. By taking the survey you can help us identify where broadband investments are needed. Your feedback will inform our broadband initiative to help ensure all the members of our communities have access to affordable broadband and Rhode Island remains a leader in digital connectivity into the future.

Don't have internet? This survey is also for you! Select "No service available".

The survey takes about five minutes to complete and is available in both English and Spanish. The survey includes an internet speed test to connect survey data with broadband speed information.

1. Enter your address* _____
2. What kind of location is this?*
 - Residential
 - Commercial
 - Public
 - Industrial
 - State/Municipal
 - Nonprofit
3. Is high speed internet available at this location?* Selecting yes will bring you to an Ookla Speedtest where you will click the OK button to run the test. Upon completion you will be returned to the survey to capture additional information. This may take a few seconds. Selecting no will allow you to capture additional information on the limitations of broadband availability.
 - Yes (Begin Ookla Speedtest)
 - No Service Available

If YES to Question 3, please answer these questions. If NO, please skip to Question 16.

4. Speed test results: These fields are read only and will be autopopulated by the Ookla Speedtest App.
 - a. Download Speed: _____
 - b. Upload Speed: _____
 - c. Ping: _____
 - d. Jitter: _____
 - e. Test ID: _____

5. Who is your current internet service provider?* _____
6. What type of internet service is this connection?* If you have multiple services, please complete a separate survey and speed test for each service.
- Cable
 - Cellular
 - Fixed Wireless
 - Fiber
 - Satellite
7. Are you subscribed to a service that promises speeds of at least 100/20 mbps?* 100/20 means 100 megabits per second download speed (defining how quickly you can take in information from the internet) and 20 megabits per second upload speed. You can find this by looking at a recent internet bill. .
- Yes
 - No
 - I don't know
8. Would you like access to speeds of at least 100/20 mbps?*
- Yes
 - No
9. Is service at your location affordable?*
- Not affordable at all
 - Not affordable
 - Affordable
 - Very Affordable
10. What is your average monthly Internet bill?*
- \$1- \$24 per month
 - \$25 - \$49 per month
 - \$50 - \$74 per month
 - \$75 - \$99 per month
 - \$100 - \$149 per month
 - \$150 or more per month
 - Included in rent or association fees

11. Are you currently connected to Wi-Fi or Ethernet?* Wi-Fi means that you have a router and are accessing the internet from a wired connection in your house without your device being plugged in. Ethernet means your device is directly plugged in to the wired internet connection at your house. And Cellular means that you are accessing the internet without any wireline connection—this is often through a smartphone or tablet “data plan.”

- Ethernet
- Home Wifi
- Public Wifi
- Cellular Hotspot
- I Don't Know
- Other

12. What device are you currently using?* Please answer regarding the device you are currently using to complete this survey.

- Desktop
- Laptop
- Tablet
- Smartphone
- Android (mobile)
- iOS (mobile)
- Other

13. Home Internet Users* How many people use the Internet at your home?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- More than 6

14. Are you satisfied with your current service?*

- Yes
- No

15. Are there any other comments you wish to share regarding broadband service or Internet access in our community? _____

If No to Question 3, please answer these questions.

16. What device are you currently using to complete this survey?*

- Desktop
- Laptop
- Tablet
- Smartphone
- Android (mobile)
- iOS (mobile)
- Other

17. Is high speed internet available at this location?* High speed internet refers to speeds of 100/20 which means 100 megabits per second download speed (defining how quickly you can take in information from the internet) and 20 megabits per second upload speed. You can find this by looking at a recent internet bill.

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

18. Do you know what service providers are available in your area?* If you are currently subscribed to cellular or satellite internet as your primary service, please select "other" and enter the provider name.

- AT&T
- Cox
- HughesNet
- i3
- T Mobile
- Verizon
- Other

19. Do you have a need for a high speed internet connection?* Would you like access to speeds of at least 100/20 mbps?

- Yes
- No

20. Where do you go most often to access the Internet? (Check all that apply)*

- Library
- School
- Work
- Community Center
- Senior Center
- Local business or coffee shop
- Relative or Friend's home
- Public Hotspot
- Other


21. Are there any other comments you wish to share regarding broadband service or Internet access in our community? _____

APPENDIX D: EVENT COLLATERAL

ConnectRI Broadband Summit Invitation



Date and time

 Thursday, June 1, 2023 · 9am - 5pm EDT

Location

 Community College of Rhode Island, Newport Campus
One John H. Chafee Blvd. Newport, RI 02840
[Show map](#) ▾

About this event

The Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration invite you to the Internet for All: ConnectRI Broadband Summit in Newport.

This day-long workshop will bring together critical stakeholders in Rhode Island from the federal, state, and local governments, Tribes, industry, and other key collaborators to discuss coordination on broadband efforts as the state prepares to receive significant broadband funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Connecting all people in Rhode Island to affordable, reliable high-speed internet is critical to our state's economic development and this event will provide an opportunity for us to discuss ways we can work together to efficiently and effectively utilize federal dollars to close the digital divide. [The final agenda can be found here.](#)

Statewide Digital Equity Workshop Invitation



Statewide Digital Equity Workshop

About this event

ConnectRI Statewide Digital Equity Workshop (in-person)

Join us for the ConnectRI Statewide Digital Equity Workshop, a one-day event aimed at promoting digital equity in Rhode Island. This workshop is an excellent opportunity to connect with experts, educators, and community leaders who are passionate about bridging the digital divide.

Date: Thu Nov 09 2023

Time: 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM (Eastern Standard Time)

Location: 1825 Broad St, Cranston, RI 02905

During this workshop, you will have the chance to participate in interactive sessions, panel discussions, and hands-on activities that address the challenges and opportunities surrounding digital equity. Learn about innovative strategies, resources, and initiatives that can help ensure everyone has equal access to technology and digital skills.

Whether you are an educator, policymaker, community advocate, or simply interested in the topic, this workshop will provide valuable insights and networking opportunities. Come and be a part of the movement towards a more equitable digital future for Rhode Island!

*William Hall Library has parking available behind the behind the bldg. and it is ADA compliant.

**RHODE
ISLAND**
COMMERCE

CONNECT  RI