CONNECTING
UTAH
ALL UTAH ALL ONLINE

Governor's Office of
Economic Opportunity
UTAH BROADBAND CENTER
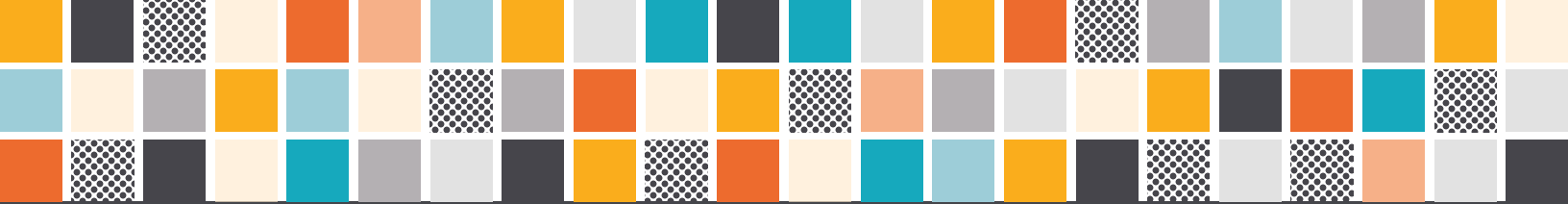
UTAH BROADBAND CENTER CONNECTING UTAH

STATE DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VISION

To realize a Utah where all are invited to fully participate in modern society through access to affordable high-speed internet, safe and reliable devices, and training to achieve digital independence.

KEY BARRIERS

AFFORDABILITY	ACCESSIBILITY	CONFIDENCE	TRUST
Cost impacts adoption of home internet and devices	Utahns won't use programs and services they can't access	Building digital skills takes a growth mindset to achieve	People need support from reliable community organizations

COVERED POPULATIONS

	Individuals with Disabilities	Aging Individuals	New Americans	Veterans
Individuals who live in covered households (at or below 150% of the federal poverty level)	Individuals with a language barrier, including English language learners and those with low literacy	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who reside primarily in a rural area	Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals

GOALS

COORDINATE PEOPLE	BUILD INDEPENDENCE	SUSTAIN PROGRAMS	EXPAND DEVICES	INCREASE OPPORTUNITY

KEY STRATEGIES

	Build a community of digital inclusion practitioners	Invest in changes at the system level	Pilot innovations to show that government works	Put connectivity within reach for every resident

1. UTAH'S PATH FORWARD

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Utah has over a decade of strong growth as a tech industry leader, adding tens of thousands of jobs and billions to the state economy.[1]

Connectivity with the digital world is the backbone of tech and a lifeline in modern society, giving residents ways to work, learn, and grow like no other time in history.

Yet despite being a national beacon in this field, hundreds of thousands of Utah residents face barriers to accessing the information age. Many need affordable internet service choices and useful devices to access the internet. For some, the digital skills learning curve is a challenge and they need additional knowledge in order to access the opportunities available online.

This is known as the digital divide.

This digital divide limits the opportunities available to Utah residents. Without access to the information age, it is no longer possible to fully participate in crucial economic, educational, and civic activities.

Digital equity–better known in Utah as **digital access**–is the future this plan lays out, where everyone can fully participate in the modern technical world. Closing the digital divide is a key factor to building a sustainable future for current and future generations of Utahns. The Utah Digital Equity Plan aims to align with Governor Spencer J. Cox's priorities of giving "equal opportunities for all" as outlined in "Utah Home."[2] These priorities are also aimed at driving the best investments and use of state resources and improving how state government serves Utahns. This plan outlines the work ahead, and it invites everyone to get involved in the goal to Connect Utah.

1.2 VISION STATEMENT

To realize a Utah where all are invited to fully participate in modern society through access to affordable high-speed internet, safe and reliable devices, and training to achieve digital independence.

1.3 VALUES STATEMENT

The State Digital Equity Plan is rooted in the following core values:

Teamwork — Integrity — Equity — Responsibilty — Inclusion — Transparency
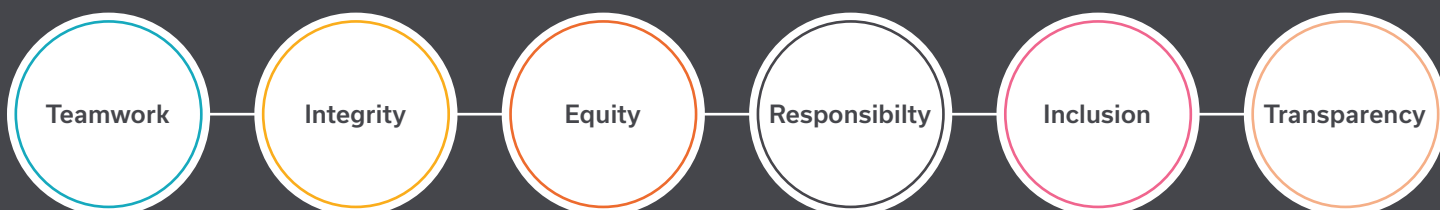
[1] (Thiriot, 2019)

[2] (Utah Home | Governor Spencer J. Cox, 2023)

Goal 1: Community coordination & resource discoverability

- º Create a digital inclusion community of practice.
- º Maximize discoverability of programs and resources with a central directory.

Goal 2: Training for digital independence

- º Create multiple pathways for digital independence through flexible programs that fit the diverse needs of Utah residents.
- º Support the expansion of existing digital skillbuilding programs at community-based organizations, senior centers, schools, libraries, and veterans' centers.
- º Prioritize the online accessibility of public services and resources, and support alternative methods of access.

Goal 3: Responsible support for sustainable community programs

- º Ensure longevity by prioritizing support for projects with a high likelihood of ongoing local investment for sustainable program maintenance.
- º Maximize the responsible use of diverse funding sources to minimize reliance on Digital Equity Act funds.
- º Highlight digital inclusion as a core service already present in the missions of many stakeholder organizations.

Goal 4: Increased availability of safe and reliable devices

- º Maximize locally available resources and expertise by supporting and codifying programs that refurbish and distribute devices.
- º Support innovative efforts to broaden the impact of device lending and public computer access in K-12, higher education, and library settings.
- º Encourage basic cybersecurity measures by requiring resources or education to be tied to all device distribution programs.

Goal 5: Affordable connectivity for everyone

- º Define true affordability for covered populations and incorporate this recommendation into the state's minimally acceptable affordable internet plan for BEAD projects.
- º Solidify existing outreach efforts to inform communities about affordable internet options, and establish coordinated ongoing outreach.
- º Support coordination between ISP, qualifying entities (state, federal, Tribal agencies) and community-based organizations to increase ACP adoption.
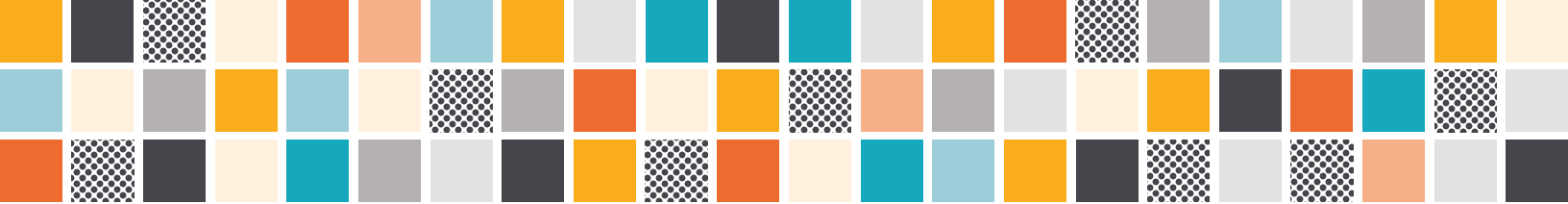
1.5 HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This document is meant as the jumping off point, a tool to enable the state to creatively implement Digital Equity Act funding and work collaboratively to close the digital divide. It is not a document meant to sit on a shelf gathering dust; it's an all-in-one **action plan**.

The vision statement identifies three things every Utahn needs to fully participate in the digital world: access to affordable high-speed internet, safe and rel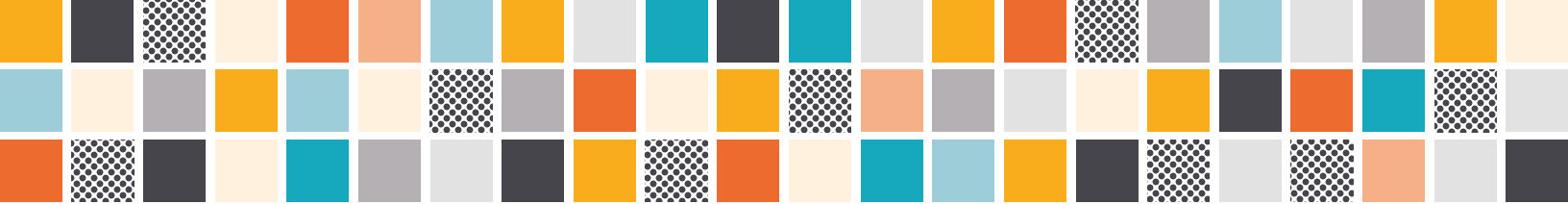iable devices, and training to achieve digital independence. Section 2 - Current State of Digital Access explores assets and barriers to each of these separately. The internet category includes affordability, accessibility, and online services. The devices category includes technical support for those devices and cybersecurity. Training includes digital literacy courses and individualized programs such as digital navigators. Section 3 - Implementation Plan proposes outcomes and activities the state will undertake to achieve this vision. Ultimately, the actions proposed will enable the state and its stakeholder partners to identify digital inclusion work as core to all public services.

Organizations and individuals who are ready to jump into action are invited to use the summary level document called **The Roadmap**[3] to align their work with the larger state effort.

1.5.1 MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the State Digital Equity Plan is to provide a specific and comprehensive guide that will lead the work in closing the digital access gap for all Utahns.

1.5.2 UTAH'S IMPLEMENTATION

The State Digital Equity Plan is the road map for how the state will implement its Digital Equity Act Capacity Grant Program funds. These funds, made available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, are intended to create a sustainable foundational system for ongoing digital access programs. This plan outlines specific actions, strategies, and programs that the grant funds will support to address barriers to digital access, with a focus on populations that are most impacted by the digital divide. Nine of these populations (referred to by the Digital Equity Act as "covered populations" due to their higher likelihood of experiencing barriers[4]) are examined in detail. However, the plan is intended to reach every Utahn, regardless of demographics, life circumstances, or type of need.

This plan will guide funding decisions and prioritize programs that will have the greatest impact on improving digital access in Utah. It will also provide a framework for measuring the effectiveness of the funded programs, ensuring that the money is used efficiently and effectively.

By implementing the State Digital Equity Plan and using it to guide funding decisions, Utah can work towards closing the digital divide and creating more equitable access to digital resources and opportunities for all Utah residents.

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[3] https://www.connectingutah.com/digital-connectivity-plan
[4] (National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), U.S. Department of Commerce, 2022)
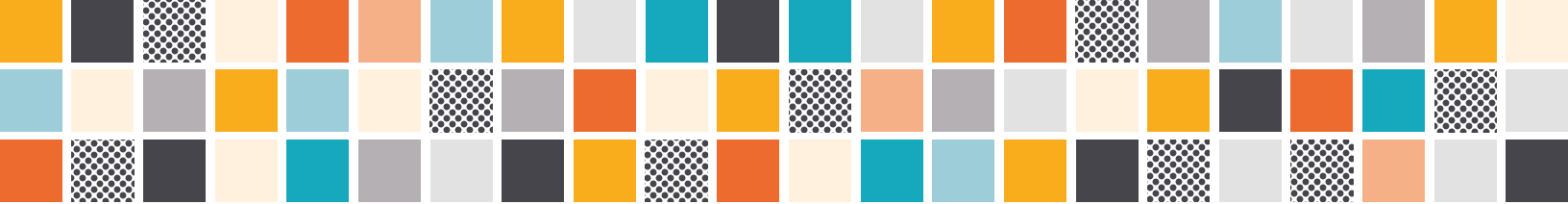
1.5.3 LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION FOR MUNICIPALITIES & ORGANIZATIONS

Local agencies, municipalities, anchor institutions, and community-based organizations can utilize this plan as a starting point to build their own local digital access plans, as insight into priorities for state and federal digital access funding, and as an opportunity to align their services with best practices for digital inclusion programs and future trends.

Creating a robust community of practice is essential to support digital inclusion efforts across all sectors of our society. The following sectors are already stakeholders in digital inclusion work, and could participate as members of this community of practice:

- Nonprofit organizations: Nonprofit organizations are often at the forefront of digital inclusion efforts, providing digital skills training, affordable devices, and internet access to underserved communities. They could share their best practices and collaborate with other organizations to expand their impact.

- Local governments: Local governments can play a critical role in advancing digital inclusion efforts by creating policies and programs that address digital access and literacy. They could share their experiences and challenges with other communities and learn from one another.

- Schools and libraries: Schools and libraries are important community resources that provide access to technology and digital skills training. They could share their successful programs and strategies for engaging underserved communities.

- Technology companies: Technology companies could share their expertise in digital tools and infrastructure and collaborate with other stakeholders to create innovative solutions that improve digital access and equity.

- Academia and research institutions: Academia and research institutions could contribute to the community of practice by providing insights into the impact of digital inclusion efforts and researching best practices for addressing digital access.

- Community-based organizations: Community-based organizations are often rooted in the communities they serve and can provide valuable insights into the specific needs and challenges of underserved populations. They could collaborate with other stakeholders to create more effective digital inclusion strategies.

- Philanthropic organizations: Philanthropic organizations play a critical role in funding digital inclusion efforts and could share their experiences and strategies for creating impact and supporting sustainable programs.

- Healthcare providers: Healthcare providers play an important role in advancing digital inclusion efforts, as access to digital tools and resources can improve health outcomes and increase access to care. They could share their experiences and successes in using technology to improve patient outcomes and collaborate with other stakeholders to create innovative solutions that address health disparities related to the digital divide.

- **Correctional facilities:** Correctional facilities could also be part of the community of practice supporting digital inclusion efforts. They could provide digital skills training and access to technology for incarcerated individuals, preparing them for successful reentry into society. They could also collaborate with other stakeholders to address the digital divide in communities impacted by incarceration, such as the families of incarcerated individuals and formerly incarcerated individuals.

- **Faith-based organizations:** Faith-based organizations can also play an important role in advancing digital inclusion efforts, particularly in underserved communities where they have a strong presence. They can leverage their existing networks and relationships to provide digital skills training, access to technology, and support for other digital inclusion efforts. They could collaborate with other stakeholders to create more effective and sustainable digital inclusion programs that address the unique needs of their communities.

- **Media organizations:** Media organizations can play a critical role in raising awareness about digital inclusion and promoting digital access. They can help to educate the public about the importance of digital inclusion, share success stories of digital inclusion efforts, and highlight the challenges that still exist in closing the digital divide. They can also use their platforms to promote digital literacy and provide access to digital resources and tools, particularly for underserved communities. By collaborating with other stakeholders, media organizations can help amplify the impact of digital inclusion efforts and create a more informed and engaged society.

- **Youth organizations:** Youth organizations, such as after-school programs and youth centers, can be important partners in advancing digital inclusion efforts. They can provide digital skills training and access to technology to help young people develop the skills they need to succeed in the digital age. They can also serve as a hub for other digital inclusion efforts, such as providing support for families and other community members to access digital resources and tools. By collaborating with other stakeholders, youth organizations can help to create more comprehensive and effective digital inclusion programs that benefit young people and their communities.

- **Youth:** Young people themselves can also be active participants in advancing digital inclusion efforts. They can serve as digital ambassadors, helping educate their peers and community members about the importance of digital skills and access. They can also advocate for policies and programs that support digital inclusion, and provide feedback to stakeholders on how to improve digital resources and tools to better serve young people. By engaging young people in digital inclusion efforts, we can create more equitable and effective programs that meet the needs of this important demographic.

- **Residents:** Engaging residents directly in digital inclusion efforts is crucial to creating sustainable, community-led initiatives. Residents can help to identify digital inclusion barriers in their communities and provide insight into how to address them effectively. They can also serve as digital mentors, helping others in their community develop the digital skills they need to succeed. By empowering residents to take ownership of digital inclusion efforts, we can create more effective and sustainable programs that reflect the unique needs and strengths of each community.

By bringing together these stakeholders and creating a community of practice, Utah can work towards a more coordinated, effective, and sustainable approach to digital inclusion efforts across all sectors of our society.

In line with Utah's commitment to empowering local communities, local empowerment to create digital access plans is a key strategy. During the implementation phase, the state will prioritize funding decisions that align with the five goals outlined in this plan, particularly when specific locally identified efforts will contribute to achieving these goals. By supporting local plans and recognizing their importance in achieving statewide digital access goals, Utah can ensure that digital inclusion efforts are tailored to the unique needs and challenges of various communities, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable programs.
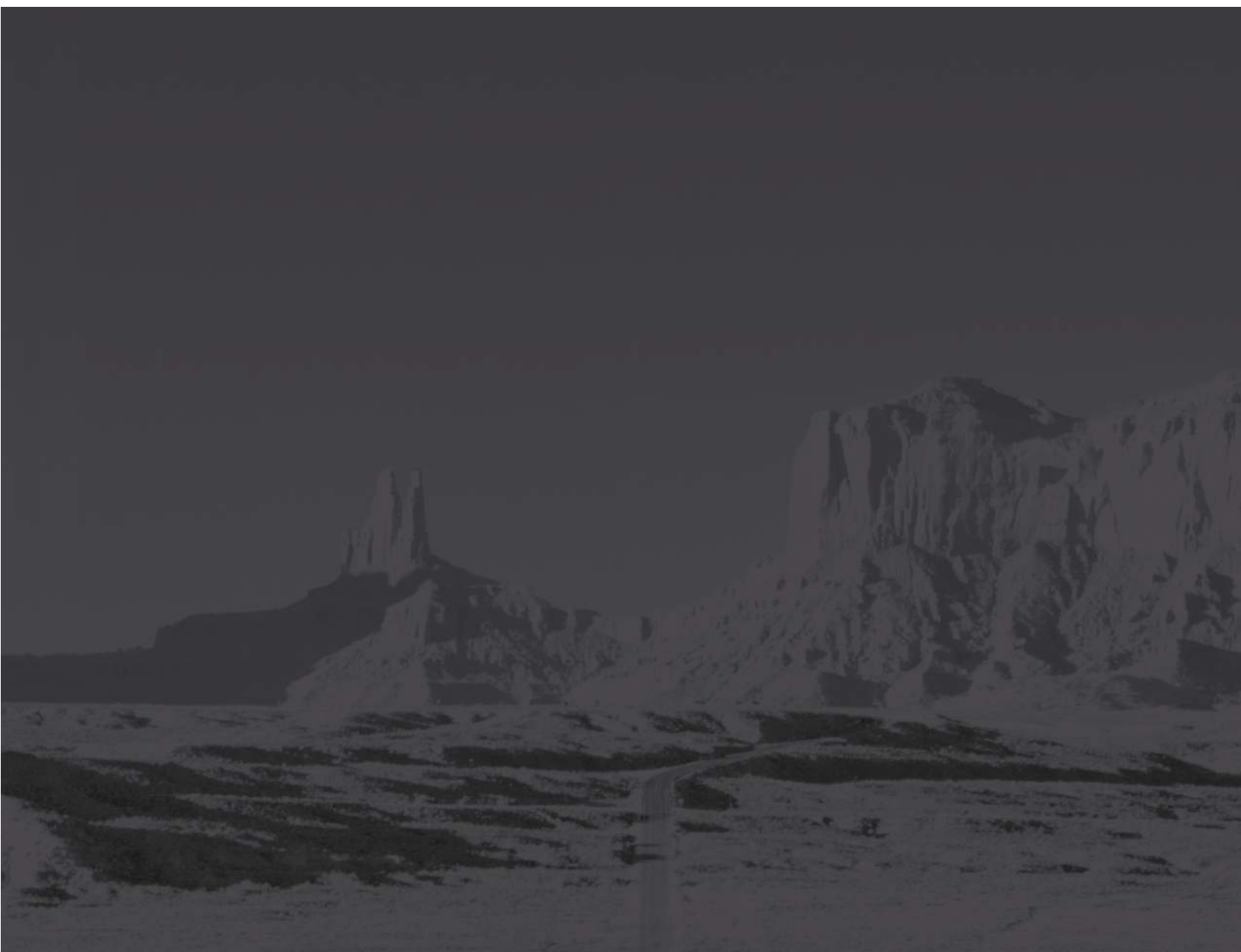
2. CURRENT STATE OF DIGITAL ACCESS

Utah's digital access ecosystem is diverse and multifaceted, with a range of stakeholders working to promote digital inclusion and bridge the digital divide across the state.

2.1 ASSET INVENTORY

Many community organizations, non-profits, government departments, and grassroots alliances already exist and are making headway on the digital divide. These **community assets** are the single largest factor in Utah's current state of digital access. A landscape survey of direct services inventoried these programs from 2021 to 2023, finding hundreds of motivated individuals and personal impact stories. Data sets were used to identify established organizations, and searches on social media and the internet turned up new, less established groups. Later, cold calls and surveys were used to solicit further information regarding specific services. Finally, the landscape survey uncovered even more community organizations and assets during the wide-ranging community engagement process and ongoing resident feedback project.

The following sections summarize key takeaways on the current landscape of services for digital access. A full inventory of organizations and specific services is provided in Appendix A - Inventory of Digital Inclusion Assets & Barriers.

2.1.1 ACCESSIBLE & AFFORDABLE HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

Affordability

The single most impactful affordability asset currently available to Utahns is the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)[5]. This federal benefit provides a $30/month discount from a home internet plan, and households on Tribal lands are eligible for up to $75/month to mitigate the higher cost of service in rural and remote areas. Unfortunately, the ACP is underutilized in Utah. Only 15% of eligible households have enrolled, less than half of the national average.[6] Other assets include efforts to increase the awareness and use of ACP, such as grant-funded projects and the state-led Act Now campaign.

- Utah-based internet service providers are valuable partners.
- 79 of the 85 ISPs or resellers operating in Utah have signed on to participate in ACP.[7]
- Only four have signed on with the White House to commit to offering a high-speed plan for no more than $30/month, the total of the ACP benefit.[8]

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[5] (Federal Communications Commission, 2023)

[6] (Marwell, Education SuperHighway, n.d.)

[7] (Universal Service Administrative Company, n.d.)

[8] AT&T, Comcast, Frontier, Verizon (fios only) (The White House, n.d.)

ACP is not the only affordability asset already providing benefits to Utahns.

- The federal Lifeline program offers an additional $9.25/month to certain qualifying households and plans, and the state of Utah Lifeline provides an additional $3.50/month.

- The Utah Universal Service Fund also enables providers to charge substantially similar rates to rural customers as those offered to urban customers by subsidizing costs. In addition, a recent proposal will add an additional $7 state Lifeline subsidy to rural residents to be implemented in the coming months.

- The Emergency Connectivity Fund temporarily allowed schools to provide home internet to student households without connectivity, but that one-time funding will not see any additional allocations to Utah applicants. Total requests (including non-home internet projects) surpassed $55 million for the state of Utah.[9]

- Federal funding to E-Rate allows anchor institutions to serve as connectivity hubs, allocating costs on middle mile builds to reduce ISP investment requirements when moving into new areas, and providing free wifi to the community through anchor institutions in the meantime.

- Additionally, some programs related to affordable housing cover utility costs which are now widely understood to include home internet. These include the Department of State Reception and Placement Program for recently arrived refugees and other housing funding for those experiencing homelessness.[10]

Availability

Utah boasts wide availability of high speed internet, despite its many remote communities and challenging terrain. This is thanks to the State's longstanding recognition of the importance of community connections and an ongoing commitment to economic opportunity. 90.8% of Utah households subscribe to some form of wired broadband service, including fiber optic, cable, or DSL.[11] The state's BEAD Five Year Action Plan examines broadband availability and existing infrastructure in greater detail.

Access to free wifi is available at all 145 public libraries across the state, always inside the building and often outside as well.[12] At 75% of public library locations, patrons can check out mobile hotspots to access wifi at home or wherever they go.[13] Bookmobiles provide connectivity at scheduled stops, often in remote areas with limited access options.[14] Libraries are believed to be the largest contributor to free public wifi statewide.

[9] (Federal Communications Commission, n.d.)

[10] (Reception and Placement - United States Department of State, n.d.)
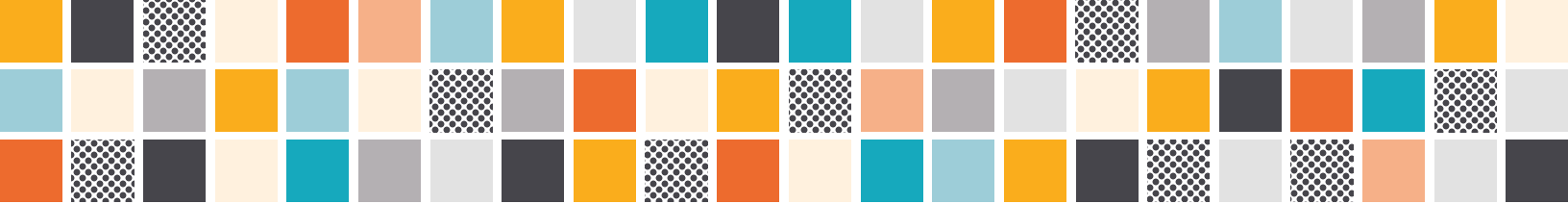
[11] (United States Census Bureau, 2020)

[12] (Utah State Library Division, 2023)

[13] (Utah State Library Division & Gabbitas, 2021)

[14] (Utah State Library Division, n.d.)

[15] (Utah Education & Telehealth Network, 2022)

Schools typically limit public wifi use due to safety concerns, but students and teachers often rely on schools as connectivity hubs. The Utah Education and Telehealth Network provides broadband connectivity to schools and libraries across the state, and over 90% of these buildings already receive gigabit speeds, the state's goal for all anchor institutions.[15]

Other municipal services and private businesses also provide access to free wifi. The Utah Department of Transportation, Utah Division of Technology Service, and other state agencies offer public wifi networks at various locations throughout the state which include rest stops, visitor centers, and distributed buildings. These wifi networks are typically supported through fiber optics, so the speeds are robust enough to handle multiple users and support significant bandwidth.

The current listing of public wifi locations [16] relies on self-reporting and may not be complete. A copy is provided in Appendix A.

Online Public Services & Resources

Increasingly, public services and resources are developed for an internet-savvy user base. This means in order to access basic benefits or meet essential obligations, residents are expected to be connected and ready to participate in the digital age. Fortunately, Utah residents have a few commendable assets to increase the accessibility and inclusivity of these services.

- The Utah Division of Technology Service (DTS) is recognized nationally and in the private sector as a leader in digital government services. The division's efforts in collaboration with other state agencies ensure that public services are accessible and inclusive of Utah's diverse languages and cultures.
  - ° In 2022, Utah was ranked second overall for online user experience nationwide, received an 'A' grade for IT practices, and won the title for Best Mobile Government Website.[17]
  - ° DTS has issued a new, fully accessible template for all state webpages, and agencies are expected to transition all existing sites to the new format. This will ensure web accessibility, but it also highlights the state's focus on creating a safe online environment. The new sites use a standard "Utah: An Official Site" banner to help users feel confident navigating online services.
- Some public services already offer "navigators," individuals familiar with any proprietary systems who are available to help users access a digital public service or resource.[18] These navigators often focus on the specific system their employing organization utilizes, rather than broad digital age navigation. More generalized digital navigators are explored in 2.1.3 Training to Achieve Digital Independence.

[16] (Utah Communities Connect, 2020)

[17] (Web Marketing Association, n.d.)

[18] (Salt Lake County, n.d.)

[19] (American Medical Association, 2022)

[20] (IRS, 2023)

- Healthcare becomes more accessible when there is an option for telehealth, according to 80% of physicians. 62% of physicians felt patients have higher satisfaction since offering telehealth, which may indicate the need for more support using virtual services.[19]
- Many anchor institutions offer programs to supplement online public services or resources which are not accessible. For example, public libraries often partner with the IRS's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)[20] or Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) programs, which provide the option for in-person help to individuals who may be unable to file their taxes online.

Assets for Accessible & Affordable High Speed Internet Specific to Covered Populations

The following internet connectivity assets are available in addition to those already mentioned, and they are specifically available to one or more covered populations

- 1. Individuals who live in households at or below 150% FPL
  - ° All households at or below 200% of the federal poverty level are presumptively eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), meaning as long as they can document their income the enrollment process is less burdensome. This is also true for participation in Lifeline.
- 2. Aging individuals
  - ° The Utah Commission on Aging provides resources for those experiencing new challenges and barriers to connectivity as they age, including referrals to services such as community classes on using the internet to stay connected with family and free or low-cost assistive technology providers.
- 5. Individuals with disabilities
  - ° Within the Division of Workforce Services, the Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired offers classes on computers and adaptive technology.
  - ° The Utah Center for Assistive Technology also offers information and technical services to connect people with assistive technology.

For a complete list of assets for internet access and affordability available to the general public and to each specific covered population, see Appendix A.

2.1.2 DEVICE ACCESS & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In order to participate in the online world, people need secure, reliable devices with the capability to do all possible types of tasks and activities. This means devices have to be new enough to work and well-maintained for safety and privacy. Because of the ongoing cost and effort to maintain these devices, it doesn't work to think of household devices as long term investments like furniture, nor as short term recurring costs like a utility bill. Instead, devices are typically expensive at the time of purchase and likely to bring small costs both regular and unexpected (such as a screen repair or a software subscription). In this way, devices are more like a vehicle: an important purchase with daily operation which must be kept in good shape in order to remain useful and safe.

[21] (Utah State Library Division, 2021)

Device Access

- Every public library in Utah offers computers for general public use, totaling 145 locations around the state with free computer access.[21] About half of Utah public libraries also check out laptops, Chromebooks, or tablets for users to take home, usually for borrowing periods around two weeks.[22]

- 61% of K-12 schools in Utah have implemented 1:1 devices for students, meaning every student has access to their own dedicated device. In 39% of schools the student is free to take the device home overnight or on weekends, although it is unclear how many schools allow their students to keep devices over holiday breaks or the summer.[23]

- Some municipalities within Utah have undertaken device refurbishment programs, where municipally owned devices are surplussed, refurbished, and distributed for free to residents in need. Unfortunately, the process is difficult because of the need to protect sensitive government data and systems.

  - ° Provo City and Salt Lake City have both found success partnering with nonprofits that can help identify residents in need of devices and assist with the refurbishment process.

  - ° The Utah Division of Technology Service is working with the Utah Department of Cultural & Community Engagement (CCE) to design a device refurbishment pilot program, a first for the state government. If successful, this project will show a policy pathway for other state of Utah and local government entities including school districts.

- Various nonprofits and foundations exist which offer low-cost devices to consumers that may have income restrictions. Tech Charities is a Utah-based organization doing this work, and national organizations such as Human-IT and PCs for People also make their services available to Utah residents.

- The Affordable Connectivity Program offers a one-time discount of up to $100 off the purchase of a laptop, desktop, or tablet from certain participating providers as long as the consumer contributes between $10 and $50 to the total purchase price. This discount is only available once to the entire household, limiting its reach. Although there are reputable providers participating in the program, there are also predatory providers selling low quality products. The products break quickly resulting in frustrated disconnected users.

Technical Support for Devices

- Hardware support typically comes from industry, in the form of manufacturer warranties, extended warranties from retailers, and paid help like Best Buy's "Geek Squad" or Apple's "Genius Bar."

- Employers also play an important role here by providing centralized IT support for managed enterprise devices assigned to employees who work remotely or are on call and must take their computer home between shifts. Although data does not yet exist, it is possible that for a growing number of households, a work device is the primary computer used by one adult.

- Where some level of product support can be expected, general user support is not typically provided by manufacturers of devices or creators of applications. This is where **digital navigators** often come in, explored more fully next in Section 2.1.3 - Training to Achieve Digital Independence.

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[22] *Public Library Statistics*, n.d.
[23] *2021 Utah School Technology Inventory Report*, 2022

Cybersecurity

For the purposes of this document, cybersecurity is explored in the context of the individual user rather than general network infrastructure security or enterprise-level measures.

- The first cybersecurity training many young K-12 Utah students receive is in digital citizenship which teaches safe online behavior and general digital wellbeing. The state provides one program at no cost to schools, currently awarding the competitive contract to "Digital Respons-Ability." This program is backed by research and qualified instructors.[24]

- There are hundreds of free products available to consumers to protect their devices and their networks. While not all of these products are effective or even safe, many use the same high-quality framework to implement security measures as paid product options. Although free antivirus software may not have all the bells and whistles advertised in the subscription or purchasing tier, it is often the same product running underneath the hood.

- In the 2023 General Session, the Utah Legislature mandated social media companies to protect the identity and wellbeing of minors online.[25] Governor Spencer J. Cox also issued an executive order directing the Utah Department of Government Operations to develop measures to protect the privacy of Utah residents through all state systems.[26]

- A legislative audit found that DTS has a sufficient cybersecurity plan, and that 75% of school districts have a plan as well, although cities and counties did not fare well in the audit.[27]

- Two divisions within the Utah Department of Commerce (the Division of Consumer Protection and Division of Securities) offer resources to help Utahns protect their assets including in an online environment. The divisions pursue criminal penalties whenever possible on behalf of Utahns impacted by bad actors inside the state.

Assets for Device Access and Technical Support Specific to Covered Populations

The following additional assets are available to one or more covered populations.

1. Individuals who live in households at or below 150% the federal poverty level

- United Way of Utah County connects individuals in low-income households and other served populations with computers. The organization partners with the Provo City Library and the South Franklin Community Center to offer digital literacy training tied to device adoption; after clients log 10 hours of skillbuilding in a computer help lab, they are given a computer to keep.

2. Aging individuals

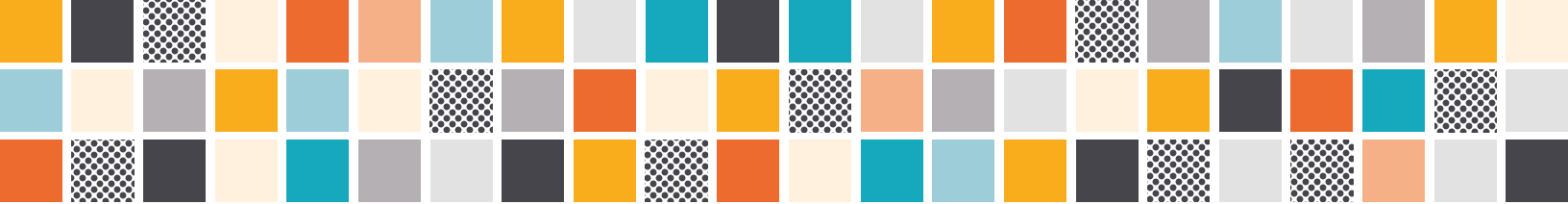- Senior centers increasingly offer technology resources to their service population, including via helplines with tech support and programs to give devices to seniors in assisted living facilities.

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[24] *Digital Respons-Ability, n.d.*
[25] *Utah Protecting Minors Online*, 2023
[26] "RELEASE: Gov. Cox Orders New Coordinated Effort to Protect Personal Data," 2023
[27] (Office of the Legislative Auditor General, 2023)

4. Veterans
- ° The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers support for individuals in need of telehealth services, including connecting them with devices when necessary.

5. Individuals with disabilities
- ° The Utah Center for Assistive Technology is a free resource offering evaluations and help in acquiring assistive devices, modifying off-the-shelf equipment to include assistive tools and adaptations, or designing customized devices to meet unique needs.
- ° In southern Utah, the Red Rock Center for Independence provides devices as well as personalized training and services to empower people with disabilities to participate in the digital world independently.

6. Individuals with a language barrier
- ° A few organizations serving Spanish speaking residents provide device adoption programs to increase the number of devices in homes. Groups such as Centro de la Familia de Utah, Centro Hispano, and Club Ability help their clients get access to free devices and set them up in their first language. These services also reach the seventh covered population, individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group.

8. Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
- ° The Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity administers the Rural Co-working and Innovation Center Grant Program, which assists in the creation of facilities providing rural residents with the equipment needed to participate in the online workforce.

9. New Americans
- ° Comunidades Unidas at the University of Utah has provided devices and other digital access support to Latinx immigrants, including undocumented community members. Refugee services such as Catholic Community Services, International Rescue Committee, and the Utah Department of Workforce Services also often provide devices as part of the case management process for New Americans.

2.1.3 TRAINING TO ACHIEVE DIGITAL INDEPENDENCE

To promote digital independence for every Utahn, there are a host of training programs and resources already available within the state. These take the form of broad digital literacy training opportunities like classes or self-paced curriculum which build foundational skills, or individualized help in a one-on-one or small group format where the content is catered towards unique knowledge gaps. Both types of programs are valuable, although they address different needs.

The largest providers of these services are public entities such as libraries, senior centers, continuing education, community centers, and business or workforce assistance. K-12 and higher education take part in the individual's ongoing digital education by presenting students with new tools, challenges, and opportunities to embrace 21st century learning. Employers in every industry are also contributors towards digital independence when providing on-the-job training for digital skills. This is especially true when companies offer to support employees through upskilling or continuing education programs to develop skills they can use in their current role and throughout their career.

This section highlights a few of the assets Utahns rely on for training to achieve digital independence. A complete inventory of training assets is provided in Appendix A.
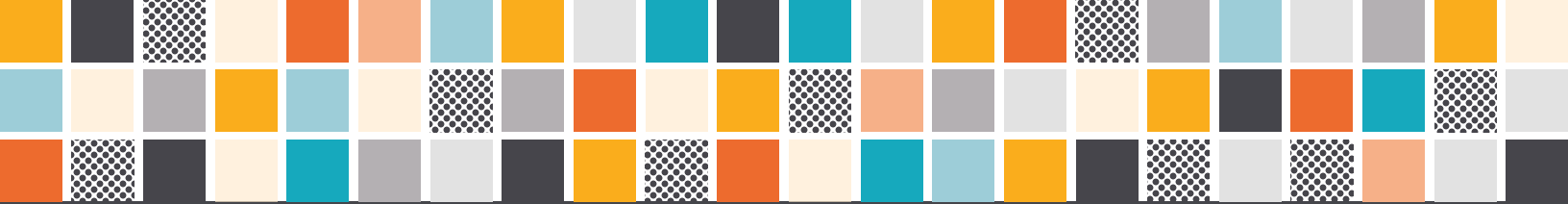
Digital Literacy Training Opportunities

- Public libraries offer a wide variety of digital literacy training. 80% of Utah libraries provide some combination of formal and informal training across 15 categories of digital skills. These trainings are free and open to the general public.[28]

  ○ The four training categories offered most frequently are:

    * general computer skills (e.g. how to use a mouse and keyboard)75%

    * general computer software (e.g. word processing), 70%

    * general internet use (e.g. web searching), 75%

    * using online databases (e.g. EBSCO), 70%

  ○ Other critical topics such as using video conferencing technologies and safe online practices (e.g. privacy and internet safety) are taught in 40% of offering libraries, although only 10% report that these are distinct, formal training topics.

- In K-12 education, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in collaboration with a parent council must select and provide a Digital Citizenship curriculum each year to teach effective and appropriate use of technology.[29] In higher education, Utah colleges and universities teach information literacy to incoming freshmen, usually bundled with research or writing skills and often taught by qualified librarians.

- Free resources are available online for anyone to build concrete skills. These range from foundational skills such as file management and emailing to specialized skills related to specific applications like graphic design platforms or programming languages. However, users receive little to no individual attention or help, and they must already be skilled enough to navigate the training platform independently.

- Faith-based organizations across the state offer life skills classes to their congregants, which include basic digital literacy, and classes for job seekers dealing with an online employment marketplace.[30] Since many worship services have moved to hybrid or fully online formats, some faith-based organizations create local assignments for assisting fellow congregants in accessing virtual meetings and building other digital skills as needed.

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[28] *(Utah State Library Division, 2021)*
[29] State Board Rule R277-491; Utah Code 53G-7-1202(2)(B) and 53G-7-1205(6)(b)
[30] (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.)

- The competitive NTEN Digital Inclusion Fellowship offers a professional development opportunity for people wanting to serve the public's digital inclusion needs, and skills learned in this fellowship are foundational for establishing ongoing digital skills training in the state.

Individualized Help

- Some organizations such as libraries[31] offer individual help in the form of **digital navigators**, knowledgeable individuals who help clients identify the skills they want to learn, create and implement a training plan, and often build a personal relationship with the client. These types of programs are staff- and resource-intensive, but they are highly effective at building confidence and enthusiasm in clients to encourage further independence.

- Drop-in help labs are available to some urban communities, with open hours where anyone can practice using a computer or other device, ask for one-on-one help, and receive referrals to additional resources for their specific situation.[32]

- Six Utah based organizations (listed in Appendix D) received FCC grants to support Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment, which often includes personal assistance navigating a digital maze of paperwork and verification. However, these grants are specifically for ACP, not for general digital navigator assistance. Some of these organizations have put in-kind matches of their own staff time and resources into their programs in order to offer holistic help to their clients.

Assets for Training to Achieve Digital Independence Specific to Covered Populations

In a survey of organizations serving covered populations in Utah, 40% reported that they already offer at least one class or formal training which addresses digital skills, and 50% provide staff training on digital divide issues including digital literacy. However, only 5% of respondents indicated they have adequate staffing levels to meet community needs.[33]

The following assets are available in addition to those already mentioned, and they are specifically available to one or more covered populations.

2. Aging individuals

- ° The Utah Commission on Aging is working to provide future digital navigator support to aging residents to support telehealth, social connectivity, and economic independence.

6. Individuals with a language barrier

- ° The Suazo Business Center offers a language-accessible digital navigator program for entrepreneurs and small business owners.

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[31] *(Tooele City Library, 2023)*
[32] (SSL CoOp, 2023)
[33] (Shea, 2022)

7. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group

° There is a network of organizations serving Utah's diverse residents with powerful digital skillbuilding initiatives that focus on supporting multicultural backgrounds and considerations. Four such examples are Centro Hispano, Club Ability, United Way of Utah County, and the Sorenson Unity Center.

9. New Americans

° The two main resettlement agencies operating in Utah–International Rescue Committee and Catholic Community Services of Utah–both recognize the importance of digital skills and prioritize this in their programs.

° Other organizations serving refugee and immigrant needs also provide digital literacy services or resources, and when appropriate they connect clients with additional resources beyond the organization's expertise. These include the Refugee Services Office within the Department of Workforce Services and the Cache Refugee and Immigrant Connection.

2.2 BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Unfortunately, many barriers exist which prevent residents from fully participating in the digital world. Some are systemic, affecting all Utahns regardless of demographics or geography. Others are specific to individual life circumstances, and still others affect certain communities, such as the nine covered populations identified as most likely to experience barriers to connectivity and participation. To avoid unnecessary repetition, this plan examines first the individual barriers, then the systemic barriers, then the unique barriers facing each covered population. Although each individual and systemic barrier is not also listed under each covered population, the first two categories should be understood to affect both the general population and the communities identified specifically.

2.2.1 INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS

These barriers might be due to one's neighborhood, social circle, personality or mindset, or general life circumstances. They are the issues a single resident might experience that stands between them and full digital access.

Internet Access
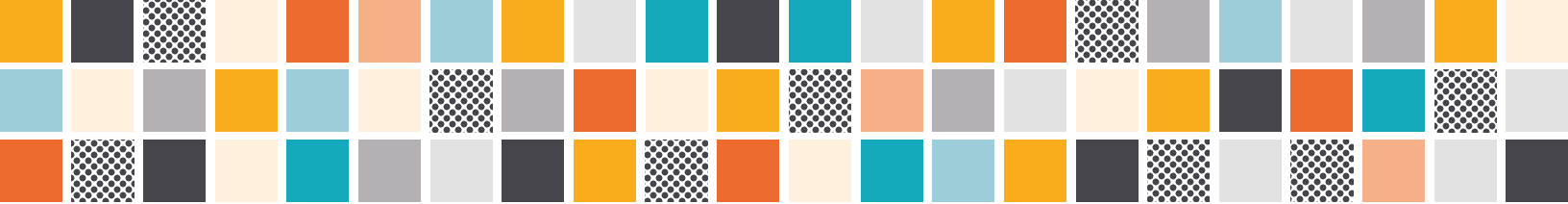
° Affordability is cited as the second most common reason for not adopting home internet.[34] Only 57% of low-income households report having home internet access,[35] and 15% of all households with home broadband reported they had trouble paying their bills during the pandemic.[36]

° A startling 68% of Utahns do not have access to a home internet plan that costs $60 per month or less.[37] This does not even account for speeds available at the lowest cost tier, which necessitates subscribing to an even more expensive plan.

[34] *(Utah Broadband Project, 2014)*

[35] (National Governors Association, 2021)

[36] (Carman & Nataraj, 2020)

[37] (BroadbandNow, n.d.)

- ° While affordability is the second most common reason for nonadopters, a straightforward decision that they do not need the internet is the first most common reason. For some, remaining disconnected or connected in a limited way is a choice. However, some may lack awareness of the value of high-speed internet and the economic, educational, and social benefits to connectivity.

Device Availability

- ° Up to 59,000 Utah households have a smartphone only, and no other computing devices to access the internet. Even more concerningly, up to 26,000 Utah households have no internet connected devices at all.[38]

- ° Older devices which are no longer supported by the manufacturer become a risk to their user. Their files could be lost and their connectivity suddenly gone if the device fails, and the lack of updates presents a security risk as well. The need to purchase new devices in a cycle is not widely recognized, and many individuals are not prepared for this expense.

- ° Some residents live in "digital connectivity deserts," areas which are too far from a source of free public wifi and computer access for the individual to reliably access. Even with public transportation, there may not be a library, community center, or other such place within a reasonable distance.

Digital Independence

- ° Individuals who lack digital skills and information literacy struggle to use high-speed internet or online services effectively. Comfort with a mobile device is not holistic digital literacy, and individuals who only use smartphones to interact with the online world are limiting themselves, whether they realize it or not.

- ° The training opportunities available to individuals may not be catered to their specific needs enough to be worth their time or commitment. People also struggle to find the programs or resources already available to them, since so often these programs rely on referrals or checking the right website in order to know how to access the service.

- ° Digital independence relies on confidence: knowing one has the skills to navigate a known environment and the tools to learn how to use a new environment. Many individuals may have some digital skills, but they lack confidence with unknown technologies or systems. This lack of confidence often results in disengagement, where the individual chooses to remove themselves from the situation rather than risk the unknown.

2.2.2 SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

These are barriers outside the individual's control. Organizations have also taken first steps to act on the digital divide for the populations they serve, and they have discovered barriers to implementing new programs.

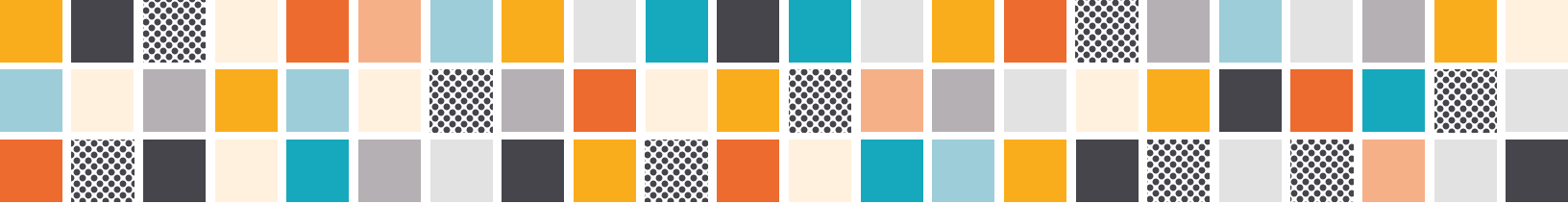[38] *(United States Census Bureau, 2020)*

Internet Access

- Issues with infrastructure are a major systemic barrier. The high cost of deployment means buildouts have historically been based on a provider's expected return on investment, which disadvantages areas with a higher cost due to terrain or distance between serviceable locations. Geographic features like Utah's mountains and deserts make the state unique, but they also create a real challenge for infrastructure deployment.

- On the other hand, some areas which were early adopters in past decades are now struggling with outdated or aging infrastructure not capable of the high speeds expected from newer technologies. Upgrades are often as expensive as new builds, and funding incentives are less available to areas with connectivity even if the speed is unacceptably low. This can leave whole neighborhoods and communities behind.

- Regulations at the federal, state, and local levels can create barriers to the deployment of high-speed internet infrastructure. ISPs may want to offer lower cost plans, but issues like the high cost to serve the area or tariffs which set certain exchange rates may limit a provider's ability to do so. In some areas there is limited competition among ISPs, which can lead to higher prices and limited service options.

- Web accessibility is not always a priority when organizations with limited capacity are building out services which are partially or primarily online. Staff may lack expertise or organizations may lack a budget for extra project time to ensure that websites and digital content are usable and accessible on all devices for all users.

Device Availability

- Device lending programs and public computer access make a big difference for some users, but these programs' effectiveness is limited. Libraries circulating Chromebooks or tablets may address some connectivity issues, but users still have limited abilities to manage files or use critical programs. Public computer labs are useful during business hours, but many people need computer access after work and late into the evening. Student devices may succeed at bridging the homework gap, but they are often severely limited in allowable uses; students may not be able to do something as simple as applying for a job with their school issued device.

- Existing local device placement programs are not centrally coordinated. Each program may only serve a small population, and organizations lack opportunity to connect with nearby peers doing similar work to coordinate between their programs and expand their reach.

- Programs which assist households in acquiring free devices or purchasing them for low cost may solve the issue for one person, but in large households this may be insignificant compared to the number of people needing a device. These programs also have a lifetime limit, meaning once the original device ages beyond usability, the household has no support in replacing it. There is typically little allowance for lost or stolen devices through these programs either.

- In an emergency situation, there are no provisions in place dedicated to device access for vulnerable people affected by the circumstance (such as a health crisis or evacuation for a wildfire or flood).

- Organizations wishing to offer digital inclusion programs such as device refurbishment efforts lack guidance on best practices, data from similar efforts, and training opportunities for their staff to design effective programs. Especially in the case of government departments which are subject to careful rules around data security, regulations and lack of knowledge may stymie efforts before they get off the ground.

Digital Independence

- Community training efforts are impactful for the individuals they serve, but they are decentralized and not uniformly available. Depending on the organization offering it, the training is often not flexible to meet unique needs.

- Especially when supported by grants or limited-time funding, training efforts are not perennial, meaning organizations do not have a chance to build trust with the community or to establish themselves as a source of reliable resources. They also lack recurring funding for proactive assessment, planning, and program design based on community needs.

- Anchor institutions have always been the foundation of training and resources for digital independence, but anchors face challenges finding ongoing funding for dedicated staff or providing appropriate training and support for staff tasked with serving as digital independence experts on top of their other job duties.

- For organizations trying to refer their clients to other services, there is a lack of clear information on the digital access resources and programs available. 80% of community organizations serving covered populations report that they do not have a designated staff member to focus on this, but their other staff still attempt to gather information on existing resources.[39] Without an extraordinary time commitment to consolidate information, existing resources may not reach the communities that need them most.

- In the modern workplace, 92% of jobs require digital skills.[40] New staff members may have a significant learning curve, especially with proprietary systems or technologies they are unfamiliar with. Even existing workers are often asked to learn new systems or processes. Although some support is expected in any onboarding process, employers often lack any broader skillbuilding resources to help employees develop new competencies to thrive at work.

- One-on-one assistance such as tech mentors or digital navigators are increasingly available in community-serving organizations across Utah, but they require constant investment and their reach is limited to their immediate area. Without wide coordination and support, pockets of communities are served but the vast majority of Utahns have no one to turn to for personalized support.

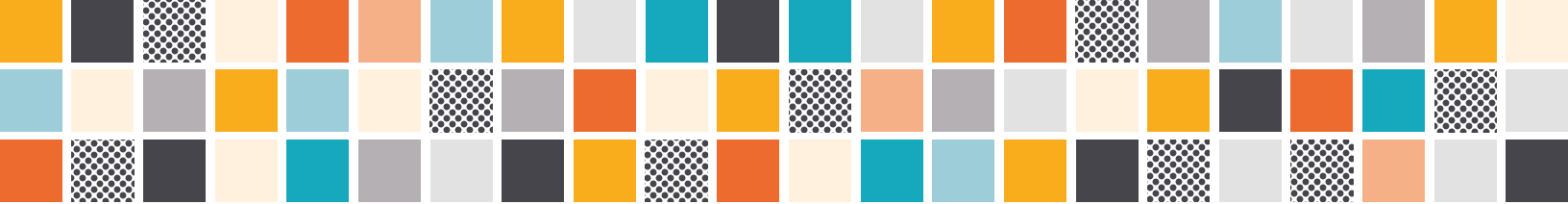[39] (Shea, 2022)
[40] (Bergson-Shilcock et al., 2023)
[41] (Digital Equity Act Population Viewer, n.d.)

2.2.3 UNIQUE BARRIERS FOR COVERED POPULATIONS

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) which administers the Digital Equity Act has identified eight "covered populations" that are more likely to experience digital access barriers. 61% of Utah's residents fall into at least one covered population.[41] No barrier is limited only to demographics; many of the things listed under Individual Barriers and Systemic Barriers also affect members of covered populations. Those same barriers may carry significantly greater impact for covered population communities. Additionally, many of the barriers listed under specific covered populations impact more than one of these groups. A more complete list of these barriers to participation for each covered population (including repetitions) is available in Appendix A.
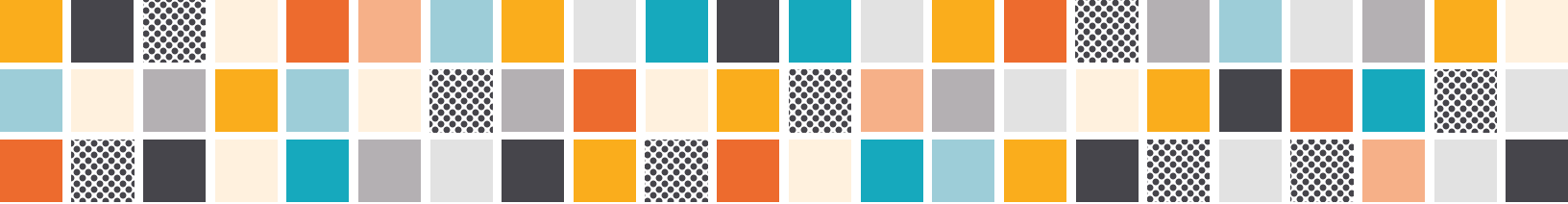
- **Individuals living in covered households:** Individuals who live in households with incomes at or below 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL). These barriers can perpetuate the cycle of poverty and limit the potential for upward social mobility.

    - Affordability is a significant issue for this population, as they may not have the financial resources to afford internet and digital devices.

    - Additionally, they may face challenges related to being a renter, such as limited agency in negotiating internet access with landlords.

    - Access to digital skills programs may also be limited due to transportation issues, and free Wi-Fi hotspots may be their only option for internet connectivity.

    - Another barrier faced by this population is digital redlining[42], which refers to the practice of providing less high-speed internet infrastructure to certain areas, often based on income level and correlated with other factors like race.

    - Finally, purchasing and replacing digital devices can be difficult for this population, as many programs only pay for one device, which may not be enough for Utah whose average household size is 3.09, the largest in the country.[43] Without access to devices such as computers, tablets, or smartphones, individuals may not be able to connect to the internet, access online resources and services, or participate in digital communication.

- **Aging individuals:** Aging individuals can face technological barriers related to a variety of factors.

    - Challenges related to accessible devices and assistive technology. This population may have physical and cognitive changes that can impact their ability to use digital devices, such as mobility issues or difficulty with vision and hearing. As such, they may require specialized devices or assistive technologies to help them access and navigate digital resources. However, these devices and technologies can be expensive and not always affordable on a fixed income.

    - Many aging individuals are living on a fixed income from retirement benefits or other sources, which can limit their ability to afford digital devices, internet access, and other digital resources. Lack of affordability can also force aging individuals to make trade-offs between digital resources and other essential expenses, such as food, housing, and healthcare.
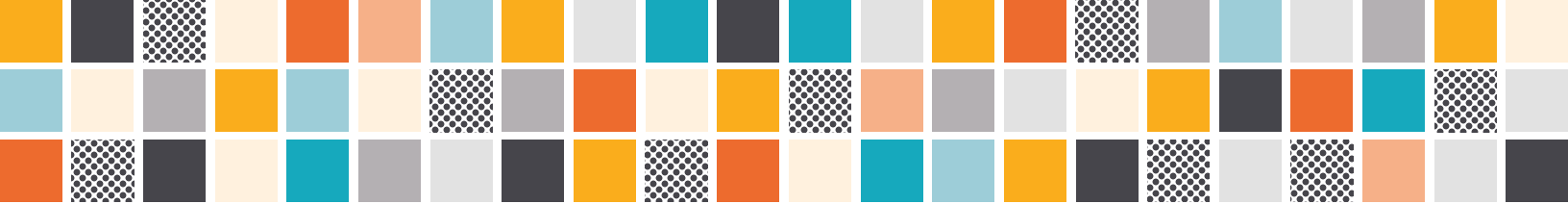
- ° Many aging individuals did not grow up with digital technology and may not have had the opportunity to develop digital skills earlier in life. This can make it difficult for them to navigate and use digital resources effectively, such as online banking, telemedicine, and social media. Additionally, new technologies are constantly emerging, and aging individuals may find it challenging to keep up with these changing digital skill requirements. Lack of digital skills can also make aging individuals more vulnerable to scams, fraud, and misinformation online.

- ° Some aging individuals may feel less motivated to learn new digital skills or use digital resources due to a variety of factors, such as feeling overwhelmed by new technologies or feeling like they are too old to learn. Additionally, they may not see the immediate benefits of using digital resources, or they may have negative perceptions about the reliability and security of online information. Lack of motivation can also be related to social isolation, as aging individuals may not see the value in digital communication if they do not have many connections online.

- ° Algorithmic discrimination is another barrier that aging individuals may face. Algorithmic discrimination refers to the practice of computer algorithms making decisions that result in unfair or discriminatory outcomes for certain groups, such as older adults. For example, search engines or social media platforms may use algorithms that filter out or promote certain types of content that may not be relevant or of interest to older adults. Similarly, targeted ads for helpful services may not reach older adults due to biases in the algorithms used to select the ads. These types of algorithmic discrimination can limit older adults' access to information and resources online, leading to digital inequities.

- ° Transportation can be a significant barrier for older adults who want to attend digital skills classes or access other digital resources outside of their home. This can limit their ability to participate in digital inclusion programs and activities that can help them build their skills and access important resources online.

- ° Aging individuals may face social isolation and lack of social support, which can further hinder their ability to access digital resources and engage in digital communities.

- **Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals:** Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals face unique barriers that make it difficult to stay connected with loved ones, access educational and job opportunities, and reintegrate into society after release.

  - ° Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals face limited agency with internet plans and access options, as their access to the internet may be restricted or heavily monitored.

  - ° Many incarcerated individuals also face predatory costs of connectivity services and limited access to digital skills classes.

  - ° Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals face social stigma that can hinder their ability to participate in digital communities and activities, further exacerbating the barriers they face.

[42] (Leventoff, 2022)
[43] (Average Household Size by State 2023, n.d.)

- ° In some cases, access to digital resources may be restricted in the name of victim protection. For example, if an individual has been a victim of cyberbullying or online harassment, they may need to have their personal information removed from public records or restricted from being shared online. This can limit the individual's access to certain digital resources or online communities, but it is done to protect their safety and well-being.

- ° Access to telehealth can be a significant barrier for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, as they may have limited access to in-person medical services and transportation to medical appointments. Telehealth can provide a means for these individuals to receive medical care remotely, which can improve their health outcomes and reduce their risk of further health complications. However, there may be restrictions on telehealth access for incarcerated individuals due to security concerns, which can limit their ability to receive the care they need.

- **Veterans:** Veterans are more likely to be a member of another covered population, such as low-income or aging, and may face the same barriers as those populations.

  - ° Lack of trust and awareness in federal programs, especially related to access to care, is a significant barrier for many veterans. They may also face similar barriers as other covered populations, such as lack of systemic support and catered public services.

  - ° Veterans may have limited digital skills or confidence, making it challenging to access digital resources.

  - ° There is also a lack of systemic support and catered public services for veterans, and fewer organizations that specifically target veterans as their main service population.

- **Individuals with disabilities**

  - ° Web accessibility: Websites, software, and digital content may not be designed in a way that is accessible to individuals with disabilities. This can make it difficult or impossible for them to access important information or participate fully in digital activities.

  - ° High cost of assistive technology: Assistive technology, such as screen readers, alternative input devices, and speech recognition software, can be expensive and not covered by insurance, making it difficult for individuals with disabilities to access them.

  - ° Stigma preventing participation in public programs: Stigma and misconceptions surrounding disabilities may prevent individuals with disabilities from participating in public programs, such as job training or educational courses, that could help them build digital skills and access new opportunities.

  - ° Qualified technical support: Technical support staff may not be trained in how to work with individuals with disabilities or with necessary accommodations or assistive technology, making it difficult for the individuals to receive the assistance they need to access digital resources.

  - ° Physical changes (motor skills, hearing, vision): Physical changes, such as loss of vision, hearing, or motor skills, can necessitate constant adaptation and ongoing skillbuilding to use additional assistive technology.

° Cognitive and memory conditions: Cognitive and memory conditions, such as dementia or intellectual disabilities, can make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to understand resources or to navigate digital content, as well as retain important information when building new skills.
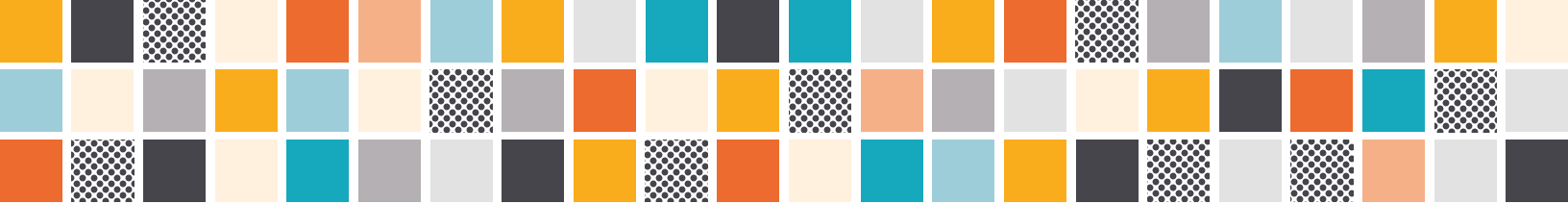
• **Individuals with a language barrier**

° Inaccessibility of public services/resources: Public services and resources may not be available in languages other than English, which can prevent individuals with a language barrier from accessing important information or resources.

° Lack of in-language support/technical assistance: Individuals with a language barrier may have difficulty accessing technical support or assistance in their native language, which can hinder their ability to use digital resources effectively.

° Accessible design: Digital resources may not be designed with the needs of individuals with a language barrier in mind, such as providing translations or making text easy to read and understand.

° Extra difficulty enrolling in federal programs (ACP): Enrolling in federal programs, such as the Affordable Care Act, may be more difficult for individuals with a language barrier, as information and resources may not be available in their native language.

° Difficulty interacting with ISPs: Individuals with a language barrier may have difficulty communicating with internet service providers (ISPs) or understanding technical terms and jargon related to internet services.

° Passwords/account recovery/security in non-native language: Individuals with a language barrier may have difficulty creating and remembering passwords, recovering accounts, and understanding security measures in a non-native language.

° Algorithmic discrimination: Search engines and targeted ads may discriminate against individuals with a language barrier by not providing them with relevant or accurate information, or by providing them with lower-quality or less relevant ads.

• **Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group:** These barriers can exacerbate existing inequities in society, leading to a lack of access to important resources and opportunities. Additionally, the lack of representation and diversity in technology and digital media can contribute to harmful stereotypes and reinforce systemic biases.

° Algorithmic discrimination: Search engines and targeted ads can sometimes perpetuate racial and ethnic biases, leading to discrimination against individuals from minority groups in areas such as employment, housing, and lending.

° Digital redlining: Some communities, particularly those with large populations of racial and ethnic minorities, may have less access to high-speed internet infrastructure, leaving them at a disadvantage compared to areas with better digital connectivity.

- ° Racial discrimination and implicit bias in public programs/services: Individuals from minority groups may face discrimination and bias when trying to access public services or programs. This can manifest as difficulties in navigating the system, lack of access to resources, or unequal treatment.

- ° Lack of culturally appropriate materials and training opportunities: Many digital resources, such as educational materials or training programs, may not be designed to meet the needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds. This can make it difficult for members of minority groups to fully engage with these resources.

- ° Language barrier: For individuals who are not fluent in the predominant language of the country they live in, accessing digital resources can be challenging. This can include difficulties in understanding website content, filling out online forms, or communicating with customer support.

- ° Affordability: Some individuals from minority groups may have lower incomes, which can make it difficult to afford technology devices, internet access, or other digital resources that can be essential for full participation in society.

- ° Passwords/account recovery/security in non-native language: For individuals who are not fluent in the predominant language of the country they live in, navigating digital security measures such as passwords and account recovery can be difficult and frustrating, potentially leading to exclusion from digital resources.

- **Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area**
  - ° Limited broadband access: The lack of existing broadband infrastructure, including fiber-optic cables, cell towers, and satellite systems, can make it difficult to provide high-speed internet access to rural and remote areas. This can result in slower internet speeds, limited connectivity, and decreased access to digital tools and resources. Additionally, the cost of building and maintaining broadband infrastructure in rural areas can be higher, which can result in higher costs for residents and fewer service providers willing to invest in the area.[44]

  - ° Affordability: Limited competition among internet service providers (ISPs) in rural areas can result in higher costs for internet service, making it less affordable for those with lower incomes.

  - ° Limited digital literacy and skills: Rural residents may have less exposure to technology and fewer opportunities for digital training, which can result in lower levels of digital literacy and skills.

  - ° Lack of access to digital resources and services: Rural areas may have limited access to digital resources such as online education, telehealth, and e-commerce, which can hinder their ability to participate in digital activities and access critical services.

  - ° Physical barriers: Rural areas may have limited access to transportation, which can make it difficult for residents to access technology and participate in digital activities outside of their homes.

º The cost of digital devices can be higher in rural areas due to limited competition among vendors, and this can make it difficult for residents to afford them. Furthermore, lack of access to stores or vendors that sell devices can increase the time and cost of purchasing and repairing devices for individuals in rural areas, making it more challenging for them to stay connected and engage in the digital world.
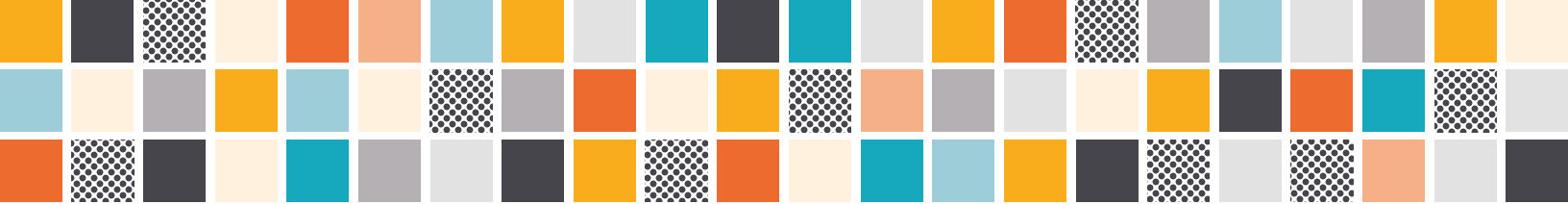
- **New Americans**
  º Lack of knowledge of community systems/services available: New Americans may not be familiar with the digital resources and services available in their new community. This can make it difficult for them to access the resources they need to succeed in their new environment.

  º Language barrier: New Americans may have limited English proficiency, making it challenging for them to navigate digital resources, including websites and online forms. This can lead to a lack of access to critical services and resources.

  º Low income upon arrival: New Americans may come to the United States with limited financial resources, which can make it difficult for them to purchase the necessary technology to access digital resources.

  º New Americans may live in multi-family households, which can increase the demand for internet access and devices. This can make it challenging for them to access digital resources and participate in online learning or job opportunities.

  º New Americans may move frequently or have to set up new accounts with digital services and systems, which can be time-consuming and challenging, especially if they are not familiar with the language or technology.

  º New Americans may have certifications and expertise from their home country that are not recognized in the United States. This can prevent them from accessing higher education or appropriate job opportunities, further exacerbating digital inequity.

  º Limited digital literacy: Some New Americans may not have had access to digital technology in their home countries or may have had limited exposure to it, leading to lower levels of digital literacy and confidence in using digital tools.

  º Cultural differences: Some digital tools and resources may not be culturally relevant or appropriate for certain New American communities, leading to lower levels of engagement and adoption.

2.3 EXISTING DIGITAL ACCESS PLANS

This is not the first time Utah has developed a statewide plan for digital connectivity. A 2014 Broadband Plan set the stage for Utah's path forwards.[45] In 2020, Governor Gary R. Herbert signed a new Utah Broadband Plan, the predecessor to this document.[46] The 2020 plan made several important recommendations which are maintained in this plan. These include proposals for collaboration between stakeholders, investment in connectivity for better education outcomes, and the recognition of barriers to adoption for underrepresented populations.

[45] (Utah Broadband Project, 2014)
[46] (Utah Broadband Advisory Council, 2020)

At least 20 of Utah's 29 counties and 242 incorporated cities and towns have developed plans for broadband, digital access, or both. Others have included some elements of broadband planning or digital access analysis in ten year master plans or other local planning documents. Those who had the vision to do so even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic have served their communities and their peers as visionaries. The state looked to these regions for leadership and best practices during its own planning process. These efforts have already paid off through past investment in their communities and subsequent economic growth.

A complete collection of local digital access plans can be found online.[47] Appendix E also provides a summary of the recommendations in plans collected by June 1, 2023.

Organizations beyond local government have adopted digital access plans as well. Nonprofits, educational institutions, government agencies or departments, and private sector organizations have all recognized the importance of closing the digital divide in their formal planning documents. Plans from organizations which directly serve covered populations were of particular interest in identifying barriers to access and gaps in the existing connectivity ecosystem. The Utah Broadband Center awarded $292,556 in subgrants to 13 local organizations to create local digital access plans. These plans increased the State's understanding of the needs of covered populations and directed the proposed activities laid out in Section 3: Implementation Plan.

[47] https://www.connectingutah.com/local-planning-grant-materials

3. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN - GOALS & OBJECTIVES

3.1 TARGET PROJECTS

Based on the barriers facing Utahns, the following projects have been identified as high priorities to achieve a digitally connected Utah. Projects are organized according to the strategic goal they address.

3.1.1 GOAL 1 - COMMUNITY COORDINATION & RESOURCE DISCOVERABILITY

Establish long-term coordination of a community of practice to ensure alignment of digital inclusion goals, objectives and activities and to maximize discoverability of and access to digital inclusion programs and resources
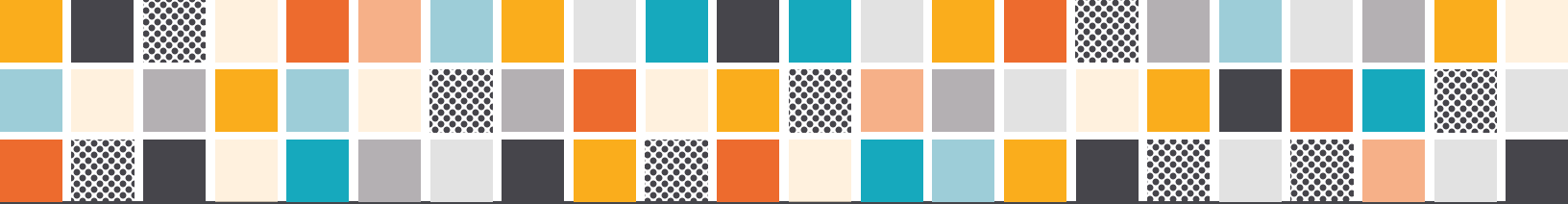
Objective: **Create a digital inclusion community of practice.**

Action: Identify a suitable backbone organization to manage a statewide network of practitioners and support capacity building.

* UBC will run a competitive RFP to identify a suitable organization with statewide reach, experience building and sustaining programs, and expertise in digital access.

* The selected organization will identify digital inclusion programs and resource providers; establish a method for practitioners to network and share expertise; gather and promote best practices; offer formal training towards certifications; and host regular community calls.

* The selected organization will provide annual reports and data as requested by the Utah Broadband Center, including an annual impact summary, granular outcome data, contact lists, and recommendations for targeted areas of focus in the coming year(s) to address remaining barriers to digital access.

Action: Provide programming stipends and connect organizations with professional development to stimulate an increase in digital inclusion practitioners and workforce across all sectors serving all Utah residents.

* UBC will provide a professional development program similar to the NTEN Digital Inclusion Fellowship, where participants receive training, work towards professional certifications, develop shared visions and goals, and connect with a professional network.

* The selected backbone organization will work collaboratively with UBC to design the training program. The backbone organization will offer the training regularly and in an accessible format to maximize participation.

Participants' sponsoring organizations will receive stipends to support their digital inclusion activities. Organizations will apply for the program on behalf of their participating employee(s). In an effort to equitably represent the needs of covered populations in funds distribution, UBC will prioritize applications from organizations with expertise in serving covered populations.

Objective: **Maximize discoverability of programs and resources with a central directory.**

Action: Establish a directory of digital inclusion programs and resources based on the asset inventory initiated during the state planning process.

* In partnership with the Utah Geospatial Resource Center, UBC will create a publicly accessible directory of all known free public programs and resources for digital inclusion.

* This directory will feature: an accessible and mobile friendly interface; a printer-friendly list or export option; an interactive map option; flags for users to indicate incorrect or misleading information; a form for organizations to submit new programs or resources for inclusion.

Action: Maintain the directory with current information for easy use by individual residents and digital inclusion practitioners.

* Once the directory is built, the selected backbone organization or RFP for another organization will assume responsibility for updating and maintaining the digital asset.

* The backbone organization will conduct an annual review, which shall include: random spot-checks for accuracy; adding, verifying, or correcting all form submissions and flags from the previous year; uploading the most recent data from existing datasets used to build the directory.

Metrics for Success:

Community of practice:

° Within six months, UBC will conduct an RFP and will select a backbone organization to create a Utah community of digital inclusion practice.

° Within one year, the selected backbone organization will launch its practitioner-facing activities (practitioner network, formal training, and regular community calls).

° Within one year, UBC will open applications for the professional development program and will select the first cohort.

° Within two years, the selected backbone organization will begin implementing the training program to the first professional development program cohort.

° Each year, the selected backbone organization will provide a report to UBC which shall contain an impact summary from the previous year, granular outcome data on the resources offered by the organization, contact lists, and recommendations for targeted areas of focus in the coming year(s) to address remaining barriers to digital access. The organization shall disseminate the report to all UBC stakeholders and to the wider community of practice.

Discoverability:

- ° Within one year, UBC and the Utah Geospatial Resource Center will publish a complete directory of digital inclusion programs and resources meeting all the usability expectations.

- ° Every year thereafter, the selected backbone organization will conduct an annual review. Upon completion of the annual review, the organization will submit to UBC a report summarizing its findings and any major updates.

3.1.2 GOAL 2 - TRAINING FOR DIGITAL INDEPENDENCE

Cultivate community training opportunities for Utah residents to build digital independence and access public services and resources.

Objective: **Create multiple pathways for digital independence through flexible programs that fit the diverse needs of Utah residents.**

Action: Create a digital independence training resource with statewide availability.

- * Provide funding for the development and implementation of a digital navigator training program, to be made available statewide to any interested organization or individual.

  - • Rely on organizations with proven success implementing this type of programming to create training materials.

  - • Within the training, identify and highlight opportunities to design flexible programs which meet specific needs for local communities, including the nine covered populations.

    - ° Ensure that organizations create programs which are not one-and-done; encourage periodic follow up contact, Q&A sessions, and the creation of peer groups.

    - ° Work in tandem with community organizations to provide information about other programs and support that are affordable and accessible.

    - ° Develop culturally-sensitive and language accessible considerations, approaches, and materials.

- * Offer practitioner training events on a regular basis in accessible locations around the state, possibly including virtually.

- * Encourage direct service organizations in every sector to support employees receiving this training. This includes education, private industry, nonprofits, libraries, veterans services, state agencies, and more.

Action: Work with Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) to formalize educational benefits for digital navigators or comparable positions.

- * Design paid internships, externships, and 'returnships' where individuals are trained as digital navigators and provide direct service through a community organization.

- * Collaborate with professional associations, labor groups, and professional licensing or accreditation authorities to allow training and service as a digital navigator to count towards required continuing education credits or practicum experience.

  - * Align with K-12 organizations to encourage high school students to participate in digital navigator training programs and public services for high school or concurrent enrollment credit.

Objective: Support the expansion of existing digital skillbuilding programs at community centers, senior services centers, schools, libraries, and veterans centers.

Action: Identify successful digital skillbuilding programs to use as a model for new efforts.

* Assess metrics already in use by direct service organizations to find trends in strategies or program design which show the greatest implementation success.

* Provide support to those organizations to create reports or guiding documents on key features of their programs for use by the wider community of practice.

Action: Actively support funding opportunities which utilize expert practitioners for the expansion of existing programs and establishment of new programs.

* Utilize backbone organization to provide ongoing professional development and support for expert practitioners building new programs or scaling existing ones.

* To increase sustainability, prioritize projects with cost sharing plans, and enable multi-year grants for organizations with a local match.

* Maintain central coordination throughout to avoid funding duplicative projects and maximize the contributions of experts.

Objective: Prioritize the online accessibility of public services and resources, and support alternative methods of access.

Action: Define a reasonable standard for accessibility of online services and resources, and assess the state's current compliance with that standard.

* Rely on industry experts such as the Utah Department of Technology Services and WebAIM at Utah State University to determine whether the new standard for state websites is an appropriate standard for local services as well.

  • Expand the standard beyond web accessibility to define appropriate "alternative methods of access," such as paper forms which can be mailed or staff available in person to set appointments.

* Make available a tool such as those created by WebAIM for local entities to measure their current accessibility against the standard.

* Work with local entities to use the assessment tool and identify needs in their own service accessibility.

Action: Provide necessary resources to all identified public service entities whose online resources do not meet the standard.

* Encourage entities to embrace the new "standard of care" for the accessibility of public services internally and to take ownership of their own accessibility.

* Where organizations do not have the ability to comply with accessibility standards, provide a mechanism to support compliance in bulk, e.g. hosting county websites or providing an agreed number of staff hours for web development.

Metrics for Success:

- Training pathway:
    - ° Within two years, UBC will have a plan to make digital navigator training available statewide.
    - ° Within three years, UBC will have offered the digital navigator training program a minimum of six times, training a minimum of 20 individuals from at least 10 separate organizations.
- Community program support:
    - ° Within one year, UBC will have identified two digital navigator or similar programs with demonstrable success.
    - ° Within two years, the identified organizations will have compiled guiding documents for wide distribution.
- Online accessibility:
    - ° Within two years, UBC will create a report on the accessibility of online services, including results from all 29 counties and at least 25% of cities and towns.
    - ° Within three years, UBC will provide resources for public service entities to increase their online accessibility.
    - ° Within five years, entities describing their online services as "fully accessible" will increase by 10%. (Exact metrics will depend on the results of the initial report.)

3.1.3 GOAL 3 - RESPONSIBLE SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Maximize responsible support for community programs to build lifespan sustainability.
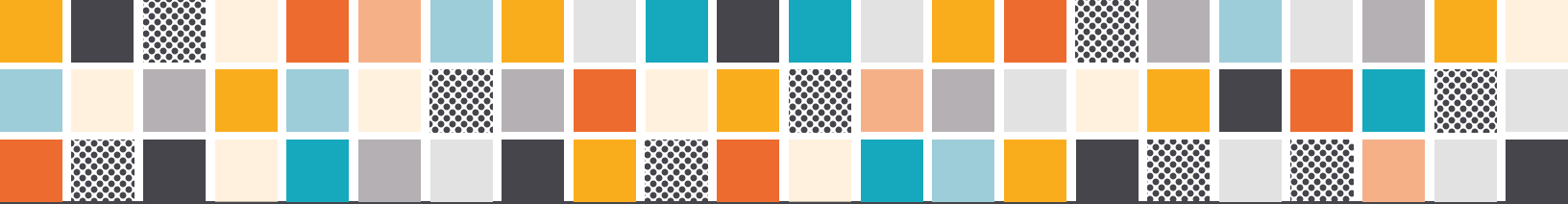
Objective: **Ensure longevity by prioritizing support for projects with a high likelihood of ongoing local investment for sustainable program maintenance.**

Action: For any programs funded by the Utah Broadband Center, require organizations to create long term sustainability plans for program maintenance beyond the term of the Digital Equity Act.

- * Encourage matches in the form of multi-year cost sharing plans, where the grant share decreases as the local or other funding source share increases until the program is self-sustaining.
- * Digital Equity Act dollars may supplement existing funding, but never supplant.

Action: Assist organizations including other state agencies and local governments with internal digital access planning and digital inclusion program design.

- * Provide templates, sample assessment documents or community engagement plans, sample job descriptions, and other resources.
- * Create clear pathways for successful existing direct service efforts to continue community-focused operations and investigate or implement new projects.
- * Where other state agencies, local governments, and community organizations create positions or assign staff to coordinate digital inclusion programs within their institution, encourage these positions to participate in the statewide community of practice.
- * Encourage bold works from organizations with track records of successful community impact.

Objective: **Maximize the responsible use of diverse funding sources to minimize reliance on Digital Equity Act funds.**

Action: Identify existing federal funding sources with outcome alignment and assist Utah organizations in identifying where digital access is already present in the objectives of those funding sources.

* Examine funding such as Americorps, Community Development Block Grants, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Department of Education state formula grants, and others to identify priority areas for existing services which are also impacted by digital access outcomes.

* Align with the state's projects and initiatives funded through other sections of IIJA to ensure when efforts can be combined they utilize the least funding possible to get the job done.

* Maximize the state's use of E-Rate funds for anchor institution connectivity, both category 1 and category 2, to ensure that every anchor institution in Utah including auxiliary locations or branches has a minimum circuit of 1Gbps.

Action: Future-proof anchor institutions by stabilizing or codifying existing state and local funding mechanisms for operations so new funding can support innovative, over-the-horizon digital inclusion efforts.

* Maintain stable funding for UETN cost sharing of anchor institutions' non-E-Rate portion and other network operations maintenance and general connectivity support expenses.

* Identify education funding mechanisms which support digital inclusion activities beyond a K-12 environment and examine the stability and resilience of the funds and recipients.

* Provide an annual increase to the Community Library Enhancement Fund to ensure public access to high quality technology is ongoing and resilient against local budget limitations.

* Assess operational costs related to connectivity and telehealth support for local health departments, clinics, and similar anchor institutions, and ensure that sites are maximizing potential participation in E-Rate and UETN services.

* Where existing workforce upskilling programs include digital skillbuilding, identify key funding sources and whether support is reflective of trends in workforce development best practices.

* Encourage local governments to work towards stable funding such as dedicated tax revenues or endowments to reduce dependency on grant cycles.

Objective: **Highlight digital inclusion as a core service already present in the missions of many stakeholder organizations.**

Action: Through professional development and investment in organizational capacity for direct services, assist organizations in defining digital inclusion as a core part of their existing missions.

* As funding support from the Digital Equity Act decreases, provide quantitative and qualitative data to show the impact of digital inclusion activities on local outcomes.

* Encourage organizations to mention digital inclusion activities specifically in long range or strategic plans and to continue to identify these activities as a critical alignment with their missions.

Metrics for Success:

- Prioritizing longevity:
  - Within three years, UBC, GOPB, and other stakeholders will examine the state's use of federal funding towards projects with digital access outcomes. If the use is determined to be below acceptable levels, UBC will work with eligible organizations to increase quality applications for federal funding.
- Diverse funding sources:
  - Within two years, UBC, GOPB, and other stakeholders will examine the 6 described funding types and make recommendations to the Utah Legislature on stabilizing or otherwise strengthening these avenues for action.
- Highlight mission:
  - With two years remaining in Digital Equity Act funding, UBC will release a mid-term report on progress towards goals in the State Digital Equity Plan so far, including qualitative and quantitative data.
  - With one year remaining in Digital Equity Act funding, UBC will release a "final priorities" report outlining goals in need of concerned efforts over the final year, as well as organizations already working on those goals.
  - At the conclusion of Digital Equity Act funding, UBC will release a summary of qualitative and quantitative data collected over the five-year period of performance highlighting the impact of local efforts and encouraging localities to maintain newly established or expanded programs in future years.
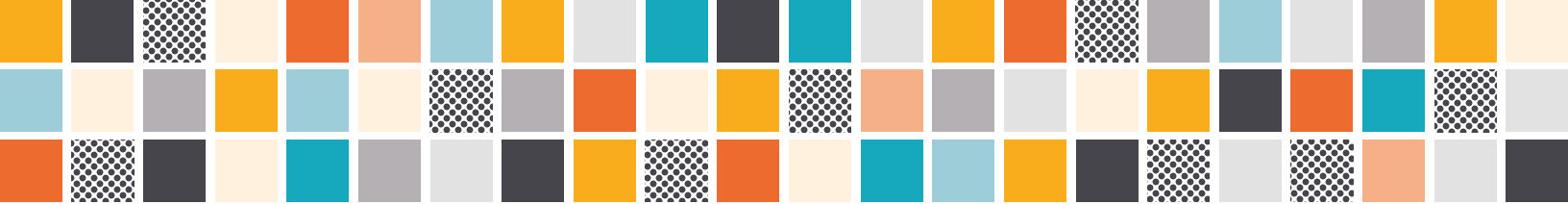
3.1.4 GOAL 4 - INCREASED AVAILABILITY OF SAFE AND RELIABLE DEVICES

Increase the availability of reliable devices statewide and encourage basic cybersecurity alongside device adoption programs to protect Utahns online.

Objective: **Maximize locally available resources and expertise by standardizing programs that recycle, refurbish and redistribute existing devices.**

Action: Streamline the process for refurbishment and redistribution of state-owned devices to fulfill community needs and maximize use of existing resources.

- Support the ongoing pilot project with DTS and the Utah Department of Cultural & Community Engagement (CCE) to refurbish employee devices and distribute them through existing partner relationships.
- Identify threats, including state code or administrative rules which prevent device refurbishment from being allowed with government devices.
- Assess pilot project strengths and weaknesses before scaling to other state agencies or local governments.
- Create a policy pathway for other public and private organizations to implement refurbishment programs customizable to local priorities.

Action: Coordinate the use of existing device placement programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and Tech Charities.

* Designate a coordinator within the community backbone organization to act as a central point of contact between device providers and community groups.

* Ensure all digital inclusion practitioners are aware of device placement programs and resources available to the community they serve.

Objective: **Support innovative efforts to broaden the impact of device lending and public computer access in K-12, higher education, and library settings.**

Action: Support programs offering device access which allow for whole-life impact, not limiting the recipient to narrowly defined activities.

* Work with K-12 to develop tools so 1:1 student devices are useful for parents without detracting from their educational purpose.

   • Assess family needs by coordinating with Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Utah Education Association, Utah Afterschool Network, Utah PTA, and other parent or educational advocacy groups.

* Support libraries and other organizations with public computer labs in offering connectivity without discrimination, not barring users from quality of life digital services such as social media, gaming, and streaming.

* Expand utilization of federal funding mechanisms such as E-Rate and the Emergency Connectivity Fund to support internet connectivity, device availability, and device lending in public schools, libraries, and anchor institutions.

Action: Develop device availability measures within disaster readiness plans to ensure residents don't lose connectivity when it is most critical.

* Allocate disaster response authority to a public entity such as UETN for expedited support to anchor institutions. Allocate funds triggered by a local or state emergency requiring online learning such as wildfires or public health crises. Align with FEMA efforts which include schools, libraries, and hospitals.

* Work with administrative rulemakers to allow for expedited purchase and distribution of devices and neighborhood-based and/or mobile connectivity hotspots when triggered by a local or state emergency.

* Designate device lending programs as essential services in order to receive federal disaster funding.

Objective: **Encourage basic cybersecurity measures by requiring resources or education to be tied to all device distribution programs.**

Action: Work with experts to develop a simple, useful guide to basic cybersecurity measures for all computer users.

* Experts involved should include DTS, the Utah Division of Consumer Protection, and the Utah State Library Division.

* Distribute a physical version of the resource to all existing digital skillbuilding programs as listed in Appendix A, as well as to anchor institutions. This should be in a format or various formats households are likely to keep, such as fridge magnets or mousepads.

* Make the resource available online and enable organizations to request copies for free on an ongoing basis.

Action: Require all device distribution programs under this plan to provide the free resource alongside devices distributed.

* Prioritize support for programs which also include basic cybersecurity training and education in a digital skillbuilding course.

Metrics for Success:
* Standardizing refurbishment:
  ° Within two years, DTS and CCE will release a report on challenges and best practices for government device refurbishment based on the pilot project.
  ° Within four years, DTS will assist the Utah Legislature in creating a pathway for local governments to safely and legally refurbish lightly used devices for distribution back into the local community.
* Broader device lending:
  ° Within two years, identify and launch a pilot project for whole-life use of 1:1 student devices.
  ° Within five years, release a report and recommendations on best practices for scaling such a program in schools across Utah.
  ° Within three years, establish device access procedures and purchasing models within existing disaster readiness plans.
* Cybersecurity:
  ° Within three years, UBC will release to the public a basic guide to cybersecurity in collaboration with its state agency partners.
  ° Within four years, UBC will distribute at least 100,000 units of the safety guide to Utah residents.

3.1.5 GOAL 5 - AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY FOR EVERYONE

Ensure affordable connectivity for every Utah resident.

Objective: **Define true affordability for covered populations and incorporate this recommendation into the state's minimally acceptable affordable internet plan for BEAD projects.**

Action: Develop partnerships with internet service providers (ISPs) to design low-cost broadband plans for low-income households. These plans should meet or exceed the FCC's definition for high speed internet and cost no more than 2% of a household's income.

* Internationally, the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development suggests a threshold for entry-level affordable broadband service at 2% of a country's average monthly income.[48] Notably, broadband prices in the United States have been notoriously difficult to study due to a lack of comprehensive data, assorted fees, and varying price-speed tiered structures.

* From the consumer perspective, an affordable internet plan for covered populations in Utah would be one that meets the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) former definition of affordable broadband for all Americans at a cost that is no more than 2% of a household's income. Although the FCC dropped this recommendation in a 2023 report, no additional guidance has been forthcoming so the State Digital Equity Plan will continue to abide by this standard until a new one is published. The report and order states that the FCC is dropping the 2% definition because it is "no longer sufficient to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable broadband." The FCC also states that it will continue to monitor the cost of broadband and adjust the definition of affordable broadband as needed.[49]

* Utilize low-income housing tax credit qualified census tracts to prioritize project areas. Tracts must have 50 percent of households with incomes below 60 percent of the area median gross income (AMGI) or have a poverty rate of 25 percent or more. Difficult Development Areas (DDA) are areas with high land, construction, and utility costs relative to the area median income.

Objective: **Solidify existing outreach efforts to inform communities about affordable internet options, and establish coordinated ongoing outreach.**

Action: Coordinate with community organizations to create a comprehensive database of affordable internet options available to low-income households.
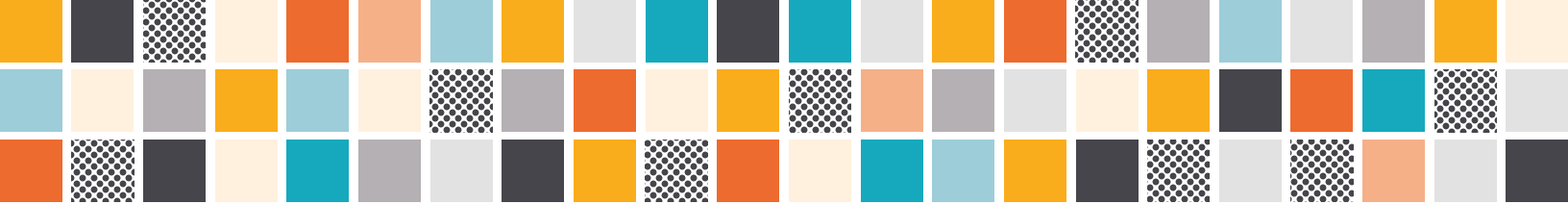
* This database should include details on eligibility requirements, cost, and available discounts. The database should be updated regularly and widely promoted to ensure that low-income households are aware of their options.

Action: Train digital navigators to work with low-income households to identify affordable internet options and help with the enrollment process.

* These digital navigators should be located in public-facing organizations such as libraries, community centers, and schools to ensure that they are accessible to those who need them.

[48] (United Nations et al., n.d.)
[49] (Federal Communications Commission, 2022)

Objective: **Support coordination between ISPs, qualifying entities (state, federal, tribal agencies), and community-based organizations to increase ACP adoption.**

Action: Work with ISPs to create a uniform, streamlined application process for low-income households to enroll in affordable internet plans.

* This process should be simple and easy to navigate to encourage greater adoption. Encourage ISPs to provide training or assistance materials to community-based organizations who are likely to support individuals in the enrollment process.

* Establish a central method for individual residents to share their experiences and their thoughts about the ACP and ISP enrollment processes with the Utah Broadband Center, to be compiled and passed on to the FCC. Coordinate with ISPs to designate ACP experts at each service provider who can answer consumer questions about the enrollment process and respond to concerns the Utah Broadband Center wishes to elevate.

Metrics for Success:
- Affordable plans:
  - Within six months, UBC will report publicly and to the Utah Broadband Alliance the percentage of low-income households with access to affordable broadband plans according to the state's definition.
  - Every year thereafter, UBC will update its numbers and report the new findings to the Utah Broadband Alliance.
- Affordable option outreach:
  - Within two years, UBC will determine the number of low-income households reached through outreach efforts to that point, including the state campaign with EducationSuperhighway.
  - Within three years, UBC will initiate a new coordinated outreach effort to inform households of the ACP with a target to reach 70% of the households not yet engaged through previous outreach efforts.
  - Within five years, UBC will report on the effectiveness of its coordinated plan to reach 70% of the remaining low-income households through outreach efforts.
- Coordination for ACP adoption:
  - Within two years, UBC will show an increase of 50% in ACP enrollment via FCC datasets, to reach a target of 80,000 enrolled households.
  - Within five years, UBC will show that 50% of the estimated eligible households in Utah have enrolled in the ACP.

3.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

3.2.1 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & COLLABORATION

Funding from the Digital Equity Act is a key component to this plan, but that alone will not be enough to close the digital divide in Utah. People are the key implementation tool, and this plan will rely on passionate, well-informed, connected individuals who are empowered to act locally. This is why Goal #1 focuses on people: without motivated individuals, Utah will not achieve this ambitious vision.

The backbone organization described in Goal #1 will be the key to ongoing collaboration with stakeholders. Professional development resources will give organizations the capacity to invest staff time into becoming local experts in digital access, and will demonstrate the importance of dedicating time towards participating in a professional network beyond the community being served. As this is demonstrated, Utah's community of practice will begin to grow. These emerging leaders will be both the focus of many key plan activities and the instigators of many others.
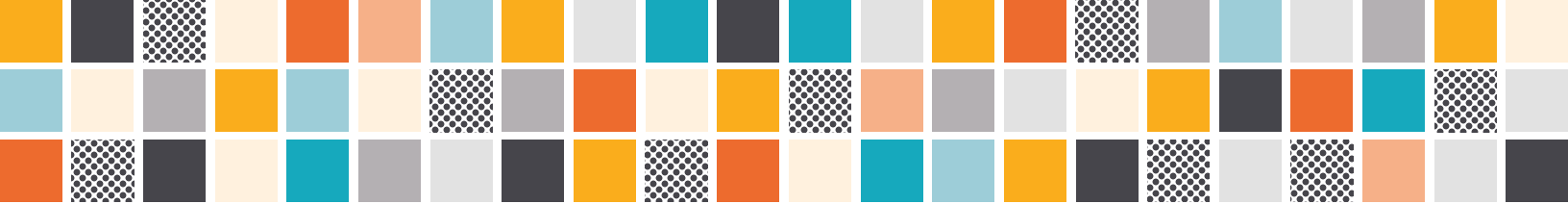
As detailed in Planning Process Section 4.1 - Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement, this plan was created with the help of broad partnerships and input from interested parties across the state. The Utah Broadband Center also intends to rely heavily on these same partnerships as a key strategy for implementation. All stakeholder organizations have been invited to participate in regular quarterly Utah Broadband Alliance hybrid meetings and monthly Connecting Utah virtual meetings. These are expected to continue throughout the implementation phase.

3.2.2 BIG PICTURE EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

The Utah Broadband Center recognizes digital access as an essential need across all sectors, and emphasizes the need to embed access considerations into systemic approaches to digital access. To ensure that the plan is effectively implemented, the Utah Broadband Center will provide an annual report to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget which oversees the state's implementation of IIJA programs, and annual or semi-annual reports to NTIA as requested.

The focus of this evaluation and assessment will be on the big picture, assessing whether efforts are generally moving in the right direction and on track to have all the goals and actions implemented by the end of the timeline. While the metrics gathered so far are all inputs, the Utah Broadband Center still needs to define target outcomes and indicators of success. This is the major implementation work: overseeing how the goals/actions are approached and measuring success by impact, not just by actions taken. Therefore, the measurement of success overview is crucial and should be a priority action for developing metrics and data sources for the logic model. The alignment updates will involve continually mapping, overseeing, and finding gaps to pivot and address them effectively.

By evaluating and assessing the plan's progress, the Utah Broadband Center can ensure that efforts are moving in the right direction and successfully implementing all the goals and actions needed to bridge the digital divide.

3.2.3 PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The Utah Broadband Center and the Utah Broadband Advisory Commission work together to oversee Utah's efforts to expand broadband infrastructure and access. The Utah Broadband Center, housed within the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, is responsible for coordinating and implementing the state's broadband initiatives, including managing grant programs and providing technical assistance to communities.

The Utah Broadband Advisory Commission, on the other hand, is a group of appointed and elected officials, industry experts, and community representatives who provide guidance and recommendations to the Utah Broadband Center on issues related to broadband policy, infrastructure, and access. The commission is tasked with developing statewide broadband plans and promoting collaboration among stakeholders to improve broadband connectivity and adoption in Utah.

Together, the Utah Broadband Center and the Utah Broadband Advisory Commission work to ensure that Utah is well-positioned to take advantage of the economic, educational, and social benefits that come with expanded access to high-speed internet.

The Utah Broadband Center will be responsible for making decisions on how the funds are allocated and ensuring that programs are implemented effectively and will be held accountable for the success or failure of the programs and the appropriate use of funds.

To assess progress towards the vision during the five-year period and beyond, the Utah Broadband Center will work closely with the selected backbone organization described in Goal #1. The backbone organization will help track progress towards the goals outlined in the strategic plan and provide regular updates to the commission and the public.

Resident feedback will also be a critical component of the accountability process. The Utah Broadband Center will seek input from residents in covered populations to assess progress and identify areas for improvement. This feedback will be used to adjust programs and priorities as necessary to ensure that the needs of covered populations are being met.

3.2.4 ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER STATE PLAN OUTCOMES

The State Digital Equity Plan is written to align with other state digital plan outcomes to ensure a cohesive and comprehensive approach to digital access. This alignment is critical to ensure that the various plans and initiatives complement each other and work towards common goals.

The Utah State Digital Equity Plan is aligned with other state plans, such as the Department of Workforce Services Strategic (DWSS) Plan[50], the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) State Plan[51], the Child Care (CCSP) State Plan[52], the Refugee State Plan[53], the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

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[50] (Department of Workforce Services, n.d.)

[51] (Workforce Development, Utah Department of Workforce Services, 2020)

[52] (Department of Workforce Services, 2021)

[53] (Brown, n.d.)

Program (SNAP) State Plan[54], the Veteran State Plan[55], the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) State Plan[56], the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) Plan [57], the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Plan[58], the Utah Department of Cultural & Community Engagement (CCE) Strategic Plan[59], the Utah Intergenerational Poverty Initiative (IGPI)[60], the State of Utah's Essential Services (DTS) Strategic Plan[61], the State of Utah Corrections (UDC) Strategic Plan[62], and the Utah State Plan for Aging & Adult Services[63]. These plans all recognize the importance of digital skills and opportunities for success in the modern economy. They also commit to making their services more accessible to Utahns who do not have digital access.

The following are specific outcome alignments between the State Digital Equity Plan and other existing state plans, organized by the relevant actions proposed in Section 2: Implementation.

Goal 1: Community coordination & resource discoverability
- ° Creating a statewide digital inclusion community of practice, to bring together stakeholders from across the state to work on issues related to digital equity.

- ° Providing professional development for staff on using and teaching technology effectively. This would help staff in public services reach more people and make it easier for people to succeed.

Goal 2: Training for digital independence
- ° All the listed plans recognize the importance of digital skills for success in the modern economy. The DWSS, TANF, CCSP, Refugee State Plan, SNAP, Veteran, WIOA, USBE, UDOH, CCE, IGPI, DTS, UDC, and Aging & Adult Services plans all include digital literacy training or digital skillbuilding. The State Digital Equity Plan ensures that training programs are aligned and that Utahns can access the resources they need to develop digital skills.

- ° Developing common digital literacy standards: The Utah Broadband Center can work with stakeholders including the Utah Department of Education, Aging & Adults Services, and others to develop a set of consistent digital literacy standards across all state programs. This would ensure that all Utahns learn the same digital skills, regardless of their age, where they live, or what program they participate in.

[54] (Department of Workforce Services, 2015)

[55] (Department of Workforce Services, 2020)

[56] (Department of Workforce Services et al., 2022)

[57] (Utah State Board of Education, 2021)

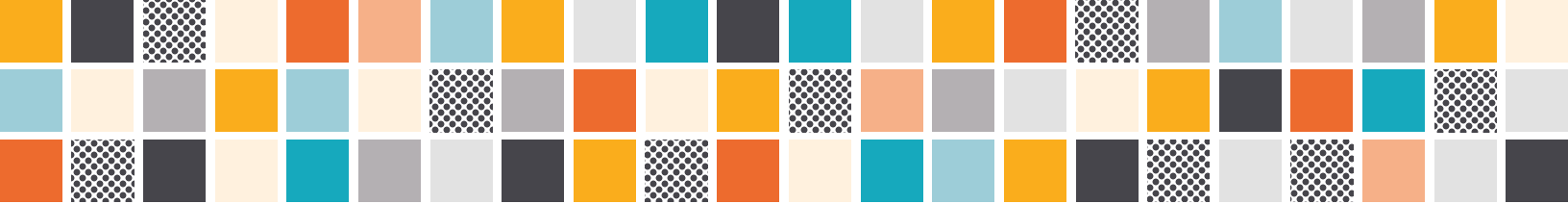[58] (Children With Special Health Care Needs, Utah Department of Health, n.d.)

[59] (Utah Department of Cultural & Community Engagement, 2023)

[60] (Phillips, 2022)

[61] (Utah Division of Technology Services, 2023)

[62] (Utah Department of Corrections, n.d.)

[63] (Division of Aging & Adult Services, Utah Department of Health, 2019)

Goal 3: Responsible support for sustainable community programs

- ° Funding research on digital equity: The Utah Broadband Center can partner with other plans and organizations to support research on digital equity. This research could help to inform the development of policies and programs to close the digital divide and create a better system for all Utahns.

Goal 4: Increased availability of safe and reliable devices & Goal 5: Affordable connectivity for everyone

- ° All of the plans commit to making their services more accessible to Utahns who do not have digital access. The DWSS, TANF, CCSP, Refugee State Plan, SNAP, Veteran, WIOA, USBE, UDOH, CCE, IGPI, DTS, UDC, and Aging & Adult Services plans all aim to provide financial assistance to help Utahns purchase computers and internet access. The State Digital Equity Plan aligns to ensure that efforts are coordinated and that Utahns have access to the technology they need to participate in the digital economy.

The alignment of the State Digital Equity Plan with other state digital plans and initiatives is critical to ensure a comprehensive and cohesive approach to digital access in Utah. By working together, these plans and initiatives can leverage their respective strengths and resources to bridge the digital divide and ensure that all Utahns can fully participate in the digital economy.

3.3 TIMELINE

Based on the milestones listed for each target project, a project tracking spreadsheet and timeline has been created. It divides all proposed actions into three phases:
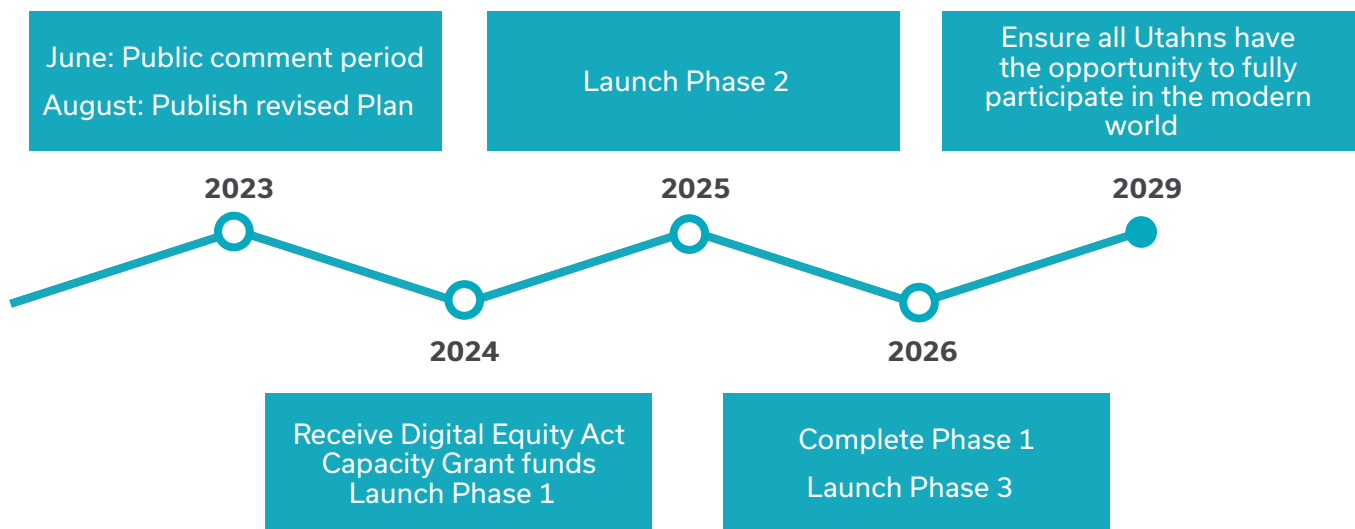
Phase 1
- ° Summer 2024 (estimated)
- ° All projects which begin immediately after receiving Digital Equity Act State Capacity Grant funds.

Phase 2
- ° Late 2024 - 2026 (estimated)
- ° All projects which require prerequisite action funded by the Digital Equity Act State Capacity Grant before they can begin, but which are precursors to other later activities.

Phase 3
- ° 2026 - 2029 (estimated)
- ° All remaining projects and activities, including final grant reporting, post-implementation assessment, and reports to internal and external stakeholders.

Note that these dates are estimates, dependent upon receipt of Digital Equity Act State Capacity Grant funds and NTIA rules and regulations regarding the implementation phase.

The detailed timeline is available in Appendix F.

3.4 ESTIMATED IMPLEMENTATION COST

To estimate the implementation cost for the State Digital Equity Plan, a comprehensive approach is needed that considers the various priorities and strategic goals of the plan. Here is a potential breakdown of the percentages and allocations for the implementation cost:

Cost Breakdown by Percentages (estimated)	
Goal 1: Community coordination & resource discoverability Allocation towards creating a digital inclusion community of practice and maximizing discoverability of programs and resources.	40%
Goal 2: Training for digital independence Allocation towards creating multiple pathways for digital independence; supporting the expansion of existing digital skillbuilding programs; and prioritizing the online accessibility of public services and resources.	20%
Goal 3: Responsible support for sustainable community programs Allocation towards ensuring longevity with prioritized support for sustainable projects; maximizing the responsible use of diverse funding sources; and highlighting digital inclusion as a core service.	15%
Goal 4: Increased availability of safe and reliable devices Allocation towards supporting and codifying programs that refurbish and distribute devices; supporting innovative efforts to broaden the impact of device lending and public computer access; and requiring cybersecurity resources or education to be tied to all device distribution programs.	10%
Goal 5: Affordable Connectivity for Everyone Allocation towards expanding existing outreach efforts to inform communities about affordable internet options; establishing coordinated ongoing outreach; and supporting coordination to increase ACP adoption.	15%
Total	100%

This allocation breakdown is only the anticipated approach and should be customized based on the specific needs and priorities of Utah's digital access ecosystem. Additionally, the estimated cost will depend on the scale and scope of each initiative within each goal. A more detailed assessment of the specific programs and initiatives needed to achieve each goal will be necessary to arrive at a more accurate cost estimate.

3.5 ALIGNMENT WITH BEAD

The Utah Broadband Center is the central broadband office for the state of Utah and will be the administrative entity for both the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program and the Digital Equity Act State Capacity Grant Program. During the planning process, the BEAD and Digital Access staff members met weekly as one cohesive team, a strategy that will continue through program implementation. Ongoing outreach and engagement will be joint efforts, as will mapping updates and data collection. The team shares administrative support and provides this support to each other by serving as scorers on each others' competitive grants or RFPs and co-writing important documents and grant reports. All these collaborations will continue during the implementation phase for both programs.

3.6 ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING

As detailed in Goal #3, the Utah Broadband Office will work with the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget to ensure high level coordination between other funding efforts. Many existing sources of both state and federal funding are intended to create the same outcomes as those proposed in this plan. Careful coordination will ensure the best use of taxpayer dollars, so Utah can maintain its reputation for quality public services and fiscal responsibility.

3.7 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER SUPPORT REQUIRED

In order to successfully undertake the actions listed herein and to achieve the outcomes proposed, the Utah Broadband Center requests the following technical assistance from NTIA:

- Provide forms for all required reports 180 days in advance of their due date so state staff are appropriately prepared regarding expectations for progress reporting.
- Prior to the State Capacity Grant Program period of performance, notify the state of any quantitative data points including publicly available or demographic statistics which the state will be expected to show as metrics of success.
- Clarify reporting requirements and quantitative expectations for "ongoing engagement with representatives of each category of covered populations within the State and with the full range of stakeholders within the State."[64]

Additionally, the Utah Broadband Center wishes to inform NTIA that the team has found the award use regulations around the BEAD planning process to be much more desirable than those around the Digital Equity Act planning process. The BEAD Program allows states to roll their planning funds directly into the implementation phase, and to use the planning funds for ongoing plan assessment and updates throughout the entire IIJA period of performance. The Digital Equity Act State Planning Grant Program, on the other hand, has no such useful allowances. At NTIA's urging, the Utah Broadband Center has staffed up, but this added capacity is dependent on Digital Equity Act funds. A significant gap in funding is expected between the submission of the State Digital Equity Plan and the award of the State Capacity Grant Program. During this time, the state will be unable to make progress towards its goals and partner enthusiasm may wane, slowing the momentum the state has already built.

The planning process has created a groundswell of enthusiasm for the important work ahead, and Utah is excited to act on this momentum. On this matter, the Utah Broadband Center makes its most significant support request of NTIA: **award state capacity grants on a rolling basis.** If NTIA can review and respond to proposed state plans when submitted, early completers like Utah will be prepared to receive their capacity grant funds long before other states. Thanks to ongoing work starting years in advance, Utah is proud to be a leader in the state planning process and one of the first states to finish its plan. The Utah Broadband Center would be honored to lead the nation in implementing capacity grants as well.

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[64] (pg. 21, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), U.S. Department of Commerce, 2022)

4. PLANNING PROCESS REPORT

Utah's digital access planning efforts started before the Digital Equity Act and IIJA with a vision for statewide digital access. Once the Digital Equity Act provided new guidelines for state plans in order to access State Capacity Grant funds, the planning efforts shifted to focus on this new goal. Additional guidance from NTIA and the National Digital Inclusion Alliance helped inform the design and implementation of the planning process. Over the course of two years, the **core planning team** received direction from elected and appointed leaders, hard-won experience from community-serving organizations, and feedback from countless residents. The result is an action plan for systemic change rooted in local solutions.

4.1 COLLABORATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The foundation of the planning process was good faith engagement and collaboration with stakeholders across Utah. The core planning team used an iterative process heavily reliant on feedback to ensure alignment with community needs.
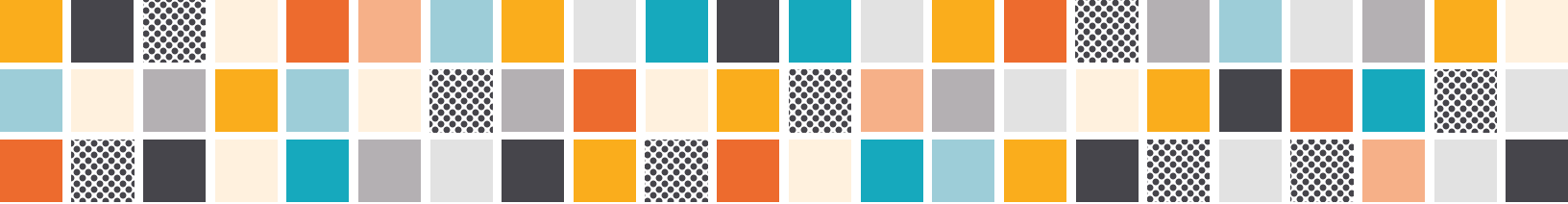
Prior to the Digital Equity Act, the Multicultural Advisory Commission of the state of Utah's COVID-19 response convened a **Digital Equity Workgroup** with the task of examining disparate lack of access which prevented Utah's multicultural communities from accessing critical telehealth resources and broader digital opportunity. Stakeholders met to draft an early-pandemic-era guiding document. This group's work is the basis of the vision found in the current plan, as well as the first source of holistic information on barriers to connectivity faced by covered populations. Those contributors are listed in Appendix G: Collaborators & Contributors.

In 2022, an informal **planning advisory group** was formed. This group provided ongoing feedback and direction through the creation of the first draft of the state digital access plan. The planning advisory group consisted of seven administrative-level representatives from education, state government, non-profit services, and library services. Each member of this group (also listed in Appendix G) has continued to be involved individually throughout the creation of the second draft.

The core planning team established an early dialogue with leaders from organizations serving all nine covered populations and reaching approximately 1,969,000 Utahns. These **community experts** provided insight into the existing landscape for digital inclusion services, and were a major contributor to the initial Asset Inventory as well as information on organizational strengths and weaknesses which will affect implementation of the state plan. These community experts are documented in Appendix G.

Beginning in the summer of 2022 and continuing through spring 2023, the Utah Broadband Center and the Utah State Library Division conducted broad **public engagement and outreach** efforts jointly with BEAD planning outreach. 75 workshops, meetings, or events were completed which touched all geographic areas of the state and covered populations. The planning team developed English and Spanish versions of a central website[65] with key information, surveys, and opportunities for

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[65] https://www.connectingutah.com/

involvement. As of April 25, 2023, there have been 2,820 website views. The team also worked with Governor Spencer J. Cox to record an informational video and PSA in both English and Spanish to encourage Utahns to participate. The video was posted on the website and the PSA was pushed to radio stations across the state. In October 2022 and March 2023, the team distributed press releases to statewide media to notify the public of the planning effort. These press releases were picked up by multiple outlets across the state. In the end, general public engagement and outreach activities reached community leaders, elected and appointed officials, government employees, community organizations, private sector interests, and individual residents. Events are documented completely in Appendix D: Community Engagement, and organizations are documented in Appendix G: Collaborators & Contributors.

The Broadband Advisory Commission, a public body created by the Utah Legislature in its 2022 General Session[66], provided additional oversight and guidance during the planning process. This began with input on plan priorities and guiding principles, and included involvement from Commissioners throughout the planning process.
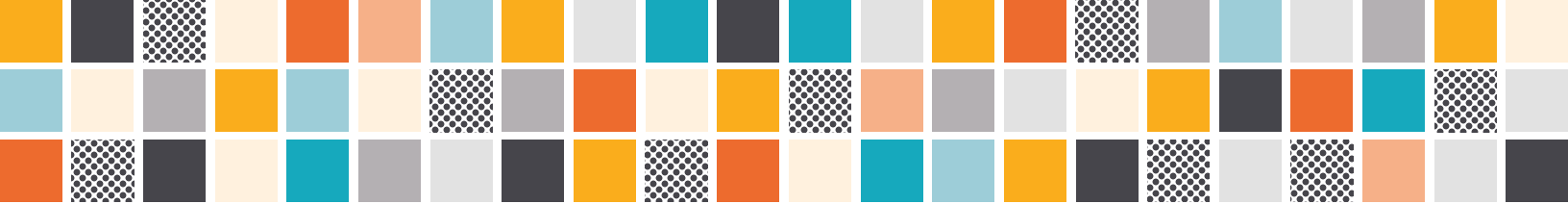
Finally, in spring 2023 a project launched to collect in-depth **resident feedback**. The Utah Broadband Center put out a call through community partners to identify individuals from all nine covered populations who were willing to participate in one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and ongoing group discussions regarding their personal experiences with digital access. Each participant is compensated for their time and expertise, and their stories inform the plan implementation and its public rollout and launch. These experts will be asked to continue providing feedback after the state plan is submitted to NTIA in order to ensure the state continues to meet the needs of all nine covered populations.

4.2 COORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT WITH BEAD PLANNING EFFORTS

The Utah Broadband Center is the central broadband office for the state of Utah and is tasked by the Utah Legislature with developing and implementing a statewide strategic plan for digital connectivity. It is the administrative entity for both BEAD and Digital Equity Act planning grants.

The Utah Broadband Center and the Utah State Library initiated a joint planning effort for the development of the BEAD Five-Year Broadband Action Plan and the State Digital Equity Plan. Because the Utah State Board of Education provided funding for a Digital Access & Education Program Manager position at the Utah State Library, this effort began before planning grant funds had been received by the Utah Broadband Center. However, it was always intended that the Utah Broadband Center take ownership of the State Digital Equity Plan and the eventual State Capacity Grant for implementation of the plan.

[66] (*SB0214 Utah Broadband Center Advisory Commission*, 2022)

As part of the IIJA, Utah was awarded $676,684 from the Digital Equity Planning Grant and $5,000,000 from the BEAD program for initial planning. Both initiatives have shared objectives and have overlapping aims. Close coordination occurred between the Digital Access and BEAD planning teams. Members of the Digital Access Team were involved with BEAD coordination meetings, and the BEAD and Digital Access teams held bi-weekly coordination meetings to discuss alignment and coordinate a united front. Both efforts utilized a shared project dashboard which made files, notes, and communication accessible and available to all. Stakeholder engagement was done as one collective effort with digital access and infrastructure data gathering built into all outreach materials. Tribal consultations included data and needs prioritization for both plans. Data collection and note coding were captured in one location and available to both members of the BEAD and Digital Access Teams.

Utilizing planning funds awarded by NTIA, the Utah Broadband Center also created parallel local planning grants for both broadband infrastructure and digital access. These programs awarded a combined total of $972,738 in planning funds to 32 local entities to work at a grassroots level to develop strategic plans for broadband access and digital access. The Utah Broadband Center team administered the two grants in parallel, staying closely connected on early findings from subgrantees.

4.3 COORDINATION WITH OTHER EXISTING EFFORTS

There are existing efforts in Utah which go beyond geographic boundaries or specific sectors to address the digital divide on a broader scale. The Utah Broadband Center worked closely with Utah Communities Connect, the only digital inclusion alliance in Utah with a statewide scope. However, other organizations do exist–both formal and informal–and the Utah Broadband Center engaged each of them in coordinating meetings to align priorities and information gathering efforts. These organizations can be found in Appendix G: Collaborators & Contributors, and coordinating meetings with their membership bases can be found in Appendix D: Community Engagement.

Planning funds were also used to award subgrants to 13 Utah-based organizations. These subgrantees were tasked with creating digital access plans focused either on geographic areas of high need or the specific needs of identified covered populations. The Utah Broadband Center held monthly cohort calls through the subgrant period of performance and provided technical assistance in the form of templates, Institutional Review Board-approved survey questions and focus group questions, outreach materials, and specialized training sessions. These plans and their findings will continue to be incorporated throughout the State Digital Equity Plan to ensure the specific barriers facing covered populations and high-need geographic areas are all addressed equitably. A list of organizations and municipalities providing individual plans, both subgrantees and those who developed plans independent of BEAD or Digital Equity Act funding, can be found and viewed in full online.[67]

Utah committed to respectfully engaging with Utah's eight Tribal Nations to collaborate on planning initiatives and implementation timelines. Two Tribal Nations and one county serving Tribal members received BEAD or Digital Equity Act subgrants from the Utah Broadband Center for local planning, and two submitted letters of interest for formula grants directly from the Digital Equity Act. Additionally,

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[67] https://www.connectingutah.com/local-planning-grant-materials
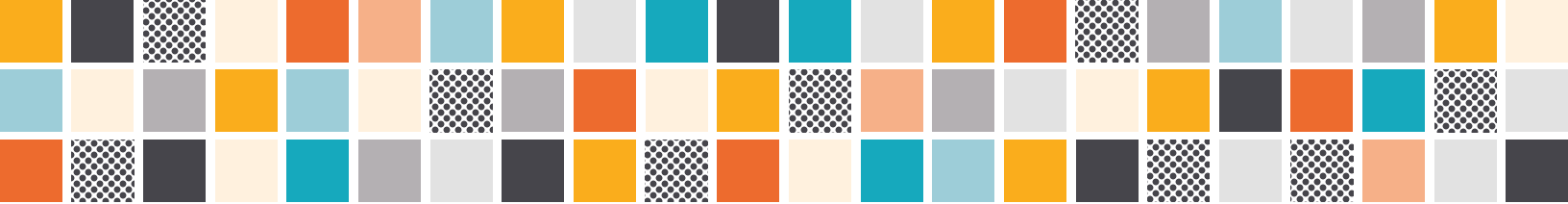
three Tribal Nations received federal Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) funds. Their funded efforts include digital access planning, understood to mean both broadband infrastructure and digital access. The Utah Broadband Center conducted formal Tribal Consultations with all eight Nations and prioritized ongoing support and communication throughout the planning process.

Finally, six organizations in Utah received FCC grants for Affordable Connectivity Program outreach or Affordable Connectivity Program pilot projects, including one Tribal housing authority. The Utah Broadband Center established a cohort with regular meetings to stay coordinated as each organization launches their projects in the coming months. This allowed the Utah Broadband Center to also consider planned ACP outreach activities while developing the State Digital Equity Plan. These organizations are listed in Appendix G: Collaborators & Contributors.

4.4 PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

[This section will include a report on the number of comments received, trends in public comments, and a summary of revisions made to the plan. A full report with public comment tracking will also be included as an additional appendix.]

Members of the public are encouraged to continue providing feedback throughout the implementation phase via the surveys and website provided by the Utah Broadband Center, which will be maintained indefinitely.

4.5 BUILDING IN FUTURE UPDATES

The State Digital Equity Plan is a living document that will continue to evolve as the Utah Broadband Center receives feedback from residents and assesses the effectiveness of ongoing implementation efforts. Digital access is an ever-changing landscape, and this document must remain flexible and adaptive to ensure that the plan stays relevant and effective.

One way resident feedback will be incorporated is through an ongoing feedback project. The Utah Broadband Center will continue to collect feedback from residents on their digital access experiences through surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. This feedback will be incorporated into future updates of the plan. A special focus has gone towards finding residents who are also members of one or more covered populations, to ensure their perspectives are included throughout the process.

The Broadband Center will also incorporate findings from ongoing assessments during the implementation phase of the plan. The team will regularly assess the effectiveness of strategies and adjust the approach as needed to ensure that progress is made toward goals. Both resident feedback and ongoing assessment will help identify areas where ongoing efforts are working well and areas where the state needs to adjust strategies to better address digital access disparities.

5. CLOSING

The State Digital Equity Plan serves as a snapshot of efforts to address digital access disparities in Utah. It is a living document that will continue to evolve as the state makes progress towards these goals. With this plan in place, the state can confidently take action on digital access disparities and promote connectivity for all residents.

To make this plan a success, community support is critical. All are encouraged to stay engaged with the ongoing efforts and follow the implementation progress by visiting the Connecting Utah website.[68] Individuals and organizations can get involved by sharing feedback with the Utah Broadband Center and by advocating for digital access locally. For those interested in taking more concrete action, the more concise Digital Equity Plan Roadmap provides the state's proposals in brief and outlines specific actions individuals and organizations can take to align with the state's efforts.

In a digital age, access to the opportunities of the online world is a fundamental right. The Utah Broadband Center is excited to embark on this important journey to building a **Connected Utah.**

[67] https://www.connectingutah.com/digital-connectivity-plan