

# Nebraska Broadband Office

## Digital Equity Plan

March 2024

# CONNECTING NEBRASKA



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# 1 Executive Summary

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The Nebraska Broadband Office (NBO) is pleased to present the Nebraska Digital Equity Plan. This document is a result of multiple discussions, listening sessions, focus groups, surveys, webinars, outreach sessions, and meetings with stakeholders across the state, and it would not have been possible without those contributions.

This project was funded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) State Digital Equity Planning Grant. States that complete and submit their formal plans for digital equity will become eligible to apply for future funding for capacity building and implementation. This plan was approved by NTIA on March 28, 2024.

The vision for digital equity in Nebraska is *Nebraskans effectively use broadband to improve their lives and grow the economy*. This means that all Nebraskans have access to high quality broadband service at prices that are affordable, and that everyone has the skills to use the service. This plan is for all Nebraskans, but intentionally focuses on eight covered populations, as required by NTIA:

- People with low incomes
- Older people
- People who are incarcerated
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- People with language barriers
- Racial ethnic minorities and Native American people
- People who live in rural areas of the state

A comprehensive needs assessment of digital equity was completed, and results indicated:

- Availability and affordability of broadband service were the two issues identified most frequently by participants in listening sessions across the state.
- 96.93% of Nebraskans have broadband service of at least 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload as of February 2024.
- About 7.2% of Nebraska households lack digital devices. To be fully connected, many households require both a mobile and a large-screen device.
- Many Nebraskans are not confident in their ability to use security and privacy practices, according to the Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey.
- To be fully connected and able to participate in the economy and society, many people need two kinds of connectivity: fixed and mobile.
- Rural residents and people living in urban areas with high percentages of low-income households have the lowest rates of broadband access at home.
- Groups that have lower rates of broadband access at home differ demographically, but expressed similar needs:
  - The need for businesses to grow in the community
  - The need for older adults to access health care through telehealth
  - The need to completing homework and accessing online classes
  - The need for their children to have opportunities to stay in their communities

Nebraska also has several assets related to digital assets, which include:

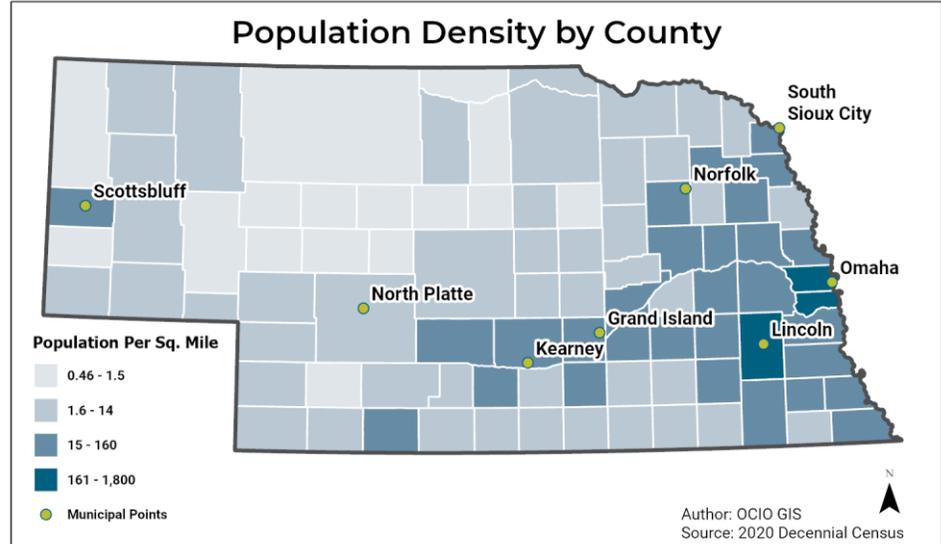
- The state’s economic development districts (EDDs) are actively involved in regional digital opportunities planning and have developed their own digital equity plans that offered foundational support for the statewide plan.
- The Nebraska Career Scholarship program provides scholarships to students at the University of Nebraska, state colleges, community colleges, and private postsecondary institutions for students pursuing degrees in programs of study leading to high wage, high-skill, and high-demand careers.
- Libraries are key community partners in promoting digital opportunities across the state. Nebraska has 273 public libraries with 78% of libraries having a service population size of 2,499 or less.
- The University of Nebraska system, state colleges, community colleges, and private colleges offer several technology-related courses and degrees.
- Nebraska’s 145 multi-purpose senior centers can be a resource for older adults. Approximately two-thirds of the state’s senior centers provide Wi-Fi access.

Five goals and seven strategies form the backbone of Nebraska’s digital equity plan:

- **Goal 1:** Increase the proportion of Nebraska households with affordable, quality broadband service.
  - **Strategy 1.1:** Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.
- **Goal 2:** Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.
  - **Strategy 2.1:** Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.
  - **Strategy 2.2:** Increase awareness of accessibility issues with state agency and local government websites.
- **Goal 3:** Increase the percentage of Nebraska households with applicable internet devices.
  - **Strategy 3.1:** Address barriers to the development or expansion of programs which refurbish and repair digital devices and/or distribute new devices to members of covered populations.
- **Goal 4:** Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.
  - **Strategy 4.1:** Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.
  - **Strategy 4.2:** Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.
- **Goal 5:** Increase the use of telehealth technologies in Nebraska to increase access to care in underserved areas and to reduce health disparities.
  - **Strategy 5.1:** Support efforts by Nebraska hospitals, healthcare providers, associations, and other stakeholders to increase the use of telehealth in Nebraska.

## 2 Introduction and Vision

Nebraska is in the heartland of the United States and is both an agricultural state and one with growing metropolitan areas. With a population of nearly 2 million, Nebraska ranks 38<sup>th</sup> in population. Its land area of over 77,000 square miles is the 16<sup>th</sup> largest out of all the states. As shown in the map to the right, Nebraska's population is concentrated in the eastern and south-central areas of the state.



Nebraska ranks 3rd in percent of households with fiber internet available, with 56% of households having fiber available. However, Nebraska ranks 30<sup>th</sup> in the availability of 25/3 Mbps and 100/20 Mbps broadband via copper, cable, fiber, or licensed fixed wireless (FCC broadband map, Dec. 2022). Ookla's speed test ranking for the second quarter of 2023 places Nebraska at 29<sup>th</sup>.

Omaha is the state's largest city. The Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area has a population of over 1 million and is the 58<sup>th</sup> most populous metropolitan area in the United States. Omaha is home to the headquarters of four Fortune 500 companies: Berkshire Hathaway, Kiewit Corporation, Mutual of Omaha, and Union Pacific Corporation. Every summer, college baseball fans flock to Omaha for the College World Series and to visit Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo which was named the best zoo in the U.S. by USA Today.

Nebraska's second largest city, Lincoln, is the state capital and home to the University of Nebraska. The Lincoln metro area has a population of 340,000. On a football Saturday, Memorial Stadium is packed with over 85,000 fans, making it Nebraska's third largest city.

Omaha and Lincoln are 50 miles apart along Interstate 80 in eastern Nebraska. Together, they are part of the Midwest's Silicon Prairie and home to several tech companies. Lincoln ranked #2 and Omaha ranked #72 in broadband speed according to Ookla's second quarter 2023 speed test ranking of U.S. cities.

The Grand Island metro area has a population of approximately 83,000. Grand Island, Kearney (pop. 34,000), and Hastings (25,000) make up the Tri-Cities area in south central Nebraska.

Other regional hubs include:

- North Platte
- Scottsbluff
- Norfolk
- Fremont
- Columbus

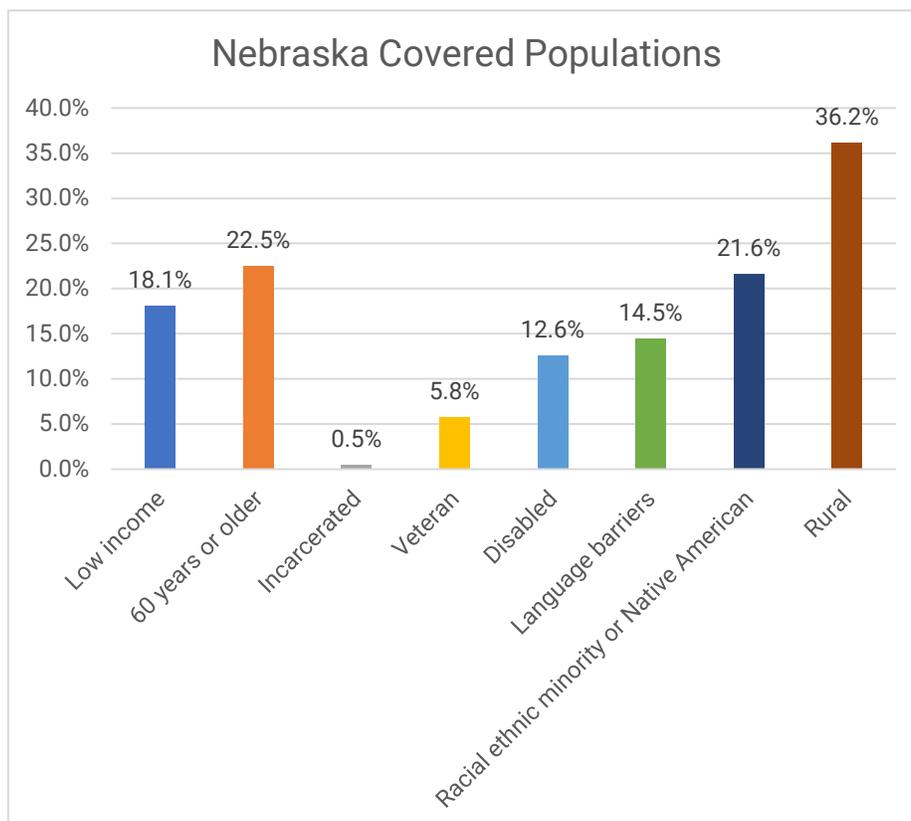
Agriculture is important to Nebraska’s economy. Nebraska ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in the production of livestock, poultry, and products and 5<sup>th</sup> in the production of crops (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] Census of Agriculture). Nebraska ranks second in the use of precision ag technologies with 55% of Nebraska farmers and ranchers using these technologies (USDA Technology Use).

## Nebraska Digital Equity Plan

Nebraska’s Digital Equity Plan was developed with funding from the NTIA State Digital Equity Planning Grant. States which complete plans and have them approved by NTIA will be eligible to apply for funding from the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program to implement their plans and set up a state digital equity grant program. Nebraska’s Digital Equity Plan is for most Nebraskans and focuses on eight covered populations:

- Members of low-income households
- People 60 years or older
- Incarcerated individuals
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- People with language barriers
- Racial ethnic minorities and Native Americans
- Rural residents

The chart shows the proportion of population of each covered population in Nebraska.



## 2.1 Vision [Requirement 6]

Nebraskans effectively use broadband to improve their lives and grow the economy.

## 2.2 Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes [Requirements 3 & 10]

Broadband Infrastructure	
State Plans, Priorities, Initiatives	Recommendations, Priorities, Initiatives
<a href="#">Governor’s State of State Address, 2023</a>	<p>Governor Pillen’s State of the State address recognized the importance of broadband infrastructure.</p> <p><i>“Infrastructure needs for Nebraska are more important than ever before. To grow Nebraska, we must address roads and broadband...Our team has also created the Nebraska Broadband Office. We have to get broadband across Nebraska completed. It will be the sole focus of the Nebraska Broadband Office.”</i></p>
<a href="#">Blueprint Nebraska Growing the Good Life report</a>	<p>Blueprint Nebraska’s Growing the Good Life report released in 2019 includes a recommendation to “increase rural broadband access.”</p>
Nebraska Hospital Association and Nebraska Rural Health Care Association <a href="#">Roadmap to Strong Rural Care</a>	<p>The Roadmap to Strong Rural Care includes the following recommendation:</p> <p><i>Invest in health care infrastructure by expanding access to virtual care technologies and rural broadband....</i></p>
<a href="#">Rural Broadband Task Force 2023 Report to the Legislature and Governor</a>	<p>The Rural Broadband Task Force 2023 Report to the Legislature and Governor recognized the importance of state-administered broadband funding programs:</p> <p><i>“Over \$130 million in funding has been awarded in Nebraska for broadband deployment projects through three state-administered grant programs since 2020, connecting over 39,000 unserved and underserved households.</i></p> <p><i>The Broadband Access, Equity, and Deployment (BEAD) Program will provide \$405 million in broadband deployment funding for Nebraska. The Nebraska Broadband Office is administering the funding and anticipates opening funding opportunities in 2024.”</i></p>
<a href="#">Nebraska Broadband Office- BEAD Initial Proposal Volume 2</a>	<p>The Nebraska Broadband Office BEAD Initial Proposal Volume 2 includes the following goal and objectives:</p> <p><b>Goal One:</b> Bolster economic opportunity by connecting every Nebraskan household and business to high-speed internet.</p> <p><b>Supporting Objectives:</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Target State grants and programs to unserved or underserved areas where private investment alone cannot sustain the investment needed to provide 100/100 Mbps broadband service.</li> <li>▪ Maximize private funding and investment in broadband buildouts to provide broadband service of 100/100 Mbps and, where not practical, 100/20Mbps scalable to 100/100 Mbps in Nebraska’s most hard to serve areas.</li> <li>▪ Utilize the best available location-level mapping and analytics to assess areas of critical need and to target areas that require subsidies.</li> </ul>
Nebraska Department of Education <a href="#">Future Ready Nebraska PK-12 Digital Learning and Ed Tech Plan</a>	<p>The Nebraska Department of Education adopted the <a href="#">Future Ready Nebraska PK-12 Digital Learning and Ed Tech Plan</a> in 2018. An updated plan is expected to be developed and released in 2024. The 2018 plan includes the following goal and action step:</p> <p><b>GOAL: CP4. BUILD EQUITY:</b> Support the creation of opportunities and programs that advance our vision of increased equity and access to technology for learning throughout the state.</p> <p><b>Recommended Action Step 5.</b> Identify and work with families in the school district who do not have home access to technology for learning. (Q3 2020, ESUs &amp; Districts).</p>
Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals and Strategies	<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goal 1 and the BEAD Initial Proposal directly support investments in rural broadband infrastructure.</p> <p><b>Goal 1:</b> Increase the percent of Nebraska households with affordable, quality broadband service.</p> <p><b>Strategy 1.1:</b> Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.</p>

### Workforce Development

State Plans, Priorities, Initiatives	Recommendations, Priorities, Initiatives
<a href="#">Governor Pillen’s State of State Address, 2023</a>	<p>Governor Pillen’s State of the State address recognized the importance of workforce development:</p> <p><i>“My budget also includes a \$10 million investment for the biennium to help recruit and train students in high-need fields, such as teachers, nurses, and food animal veterinarians for food security.”</i></p>
<a href="#">Blueprint Nebraska</a>	<p>The Blueprint Nebraska report recommends “scaling public-private partnerships that create more internships and apprenticeships per capita and customized workforce solutions than any state in the Midwest to meet the needs of expanding and relocating companies.” The report recognizes the importance of STEM programming and proposes: “Communities will embrace the use of STEM mobile labs, especially in rural areas.”</p>
Nebraska Career Scholarship Program	<p>The Nebraska Career Scholarship Act (LB 902) was passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor in 2022. The program provides scholarships to students at the University of Nebraska, Nebraska state colleges, community colleges or private postsecondary institutions pursuing degrees in programs of study leading to high</p>

	<p>wage, high-skill, and high-demand careers. Eligible programs include health care, computer information systems, engineering and those in a skilled trade or identified shortage area. LB902 requires each scholarship recipient to register with the appropriate campus office to obtain a Nebraska-based internship, apprenticeship, clinical position, or employment in a field related to their program of study before they graduate.</p>
<p><a href="#">Intern Nebraska Program</a></p>	<p>InternNE, powered by Aksarben initiative, previously recognized as the Intern Nebraska Grant Program, is a \$20 million collaborative effort between the Aksarben Foundation and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. The program aims to connect students and employers statewide by reimbursing eligible internship expenses. Although this is not exclusively a technology program, it is an important resource for developing a tech workforce in Nebraska.</p>
<p><a href="#">Nebraska Tech Collaborative</a></p>	<p>The Nebraska Tech Collaborative (NTC), an Aksarben workforce initiative, is business-lead, and comprised of over 100 business, government, education, and nonprofit partners all working together to drive results and scale to build a world class tech ecosystem in Nebraska. The Nebraska Tech Collaborative is working to increase the number of tech jobs in Nebraska by 10,000 and the number of new tech companies in Nebraska by 300 by 2025. The Nebraska Tech Collaborative has six programs which support the tech ecosystem. The State Digital Opportunities Program most closely aligns with the Teacher Externship program which strengthens teachers' tech skills through an immersive summer experience.</p>
<p><a href="#">Nebraska Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act State Plan (WIOA)</a></p>	<p>Nebraska's two-part statewide goal for preparing an educated and skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers is the:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>selection and prioritization of development of career pathways;</i> and</li> <li>2. <i>alignment of the state's workforce development system.</i></li> </ol> <p>The plan includes a goal of identifying the barriers to participation for many covered populations, including low-income individuals, older individuals, members of racial or ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders, individuals who are English language learners, and individuals who have low levels of literacy.</p> <p>Priority in-demand industry sectors identified include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Healthcare/medical</li> <li>▪ Manufacturing</li> <li>▪ Accommodation and food services</li> <li>▪ Heavy and tractor-trailer and transportation/warehouse</li> <li>▪ Construction</li> <li>▪ Education services</li> <li>▪ Agribusiness/natural resources</li> <li>▪ Technology</li> <li>▪ Finance and insurance</li> </ul>
<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals and Strategies</p>	<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goal 4 supports the workforce goals of state workforce priorities, plans, and initiatives.</p>

	<p><b>Goal 4:</b> Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.</p> <p><b>Strategy 4.1:</b> Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.</p> <p><b>Strategy 4.2:</b> Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.</p>
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### Educational Outcomes

State Plans, Priorities, Initiatives	Recommendations, Priorities, Initiatives
Nebraska Department of Education <a href="#">Future Ready Nebraska PK-12 Digital Learning and Ed Tech Plan</a>	<p>The Nebraska Department of Education adopted the <a href="#">Future Ready Nebraska PK-12 Digital Learning and Ed Tech Plan</a> in 2018. An updated plan is expected to be developed and released in 2024.</p> <p><b>GOAL: CP3. EXEMPLARS:</b> <i>Identify and share examples of existing successful school-community partnerships across the state that could be used as a resource for digital learning opportunities</i></p> <p><b>Recommended Action Step 2.</b> <i>Identify local business and industries that could benefit from an increase in digital learning opportunities within the community and share resources (Q1 2019, ESU's &amp; Districts).</i></p> <p><b>Recommended Action Step 3.</b> <i>Identify or develop opportunities or workplace experiences that could provide students with career readiness skills related to technology which allow them to be productive employees of local business and industry (Q4 2019, Districts and ESU's).</i></p>
Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals and Strategies	<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goal 4 supports the community partnerships goals of Future Ready Nebraska.</p> <p><b>Goal 4:</b> Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.</p> <p><b>Strategy 4.1:</b> Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.</p> <p><b>Strategy 4.2:</b> Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.</p>

### Health Outcomes

State Plans, Priorities, Initiatives	Recommendations, Priorities, Initiatives
Nebraska Hospital Association and Nebraska Rural Health Association <a href="#">Roadmap to Strong Rural Care</a>	<p>The <a href="#">Roadmap to Strong Rural Care</a> released in January 2023 by the Nebraska Hospital Association and the Nebraska Rural Health Association addresses the need for telehealth parity and investments in rural health care and broadband infrastructure. The report recommends:</p> <p><i>Invest in healthcare infrastructure by expanding access to virtual care technologies and rural broadband, strengthening the capacity and capability for emergency preparedness and response, assisting hospitals</i></p>

	<p><i>in “rightsizing” to meet the needs of their communities, and ensuring adequate financing mechanisms are in place for hospitals and health systems, including training of the workforce.</i></p>
Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals and Strategies	<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goal 1 and the BEAD Initial Proposal directly support investments in rural broadband infrastructure.</p> <p><b>Goal 1:</b> Increase the percent of Nebraska households with affordable, quality broadband service.</p> <p><b>Strategy 1.1:</b> Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.</p> <p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goal 5 supports efforts by the Nebraska Hospital Association and Nebraska Rural Health Association to advocate for telehealth parity by increasing awareness of the issue and building support for initiatives to address these barriers. The State Digital Equity Capacity grant may be a potential source of funding for virtual care technologies.</p> <p><b>Goal 5:</b> Increase the use of telehealth technologies in Nebraska to increase access to care in underserved areas and to reduce health disparities.</p> <p><b>Strategy 5.1:</b> Support efforts by Nebraska hospitals, healthcare providers, associations, and other stakeholders to increase the use of telehealth in Nebraska.</p>

**Cybersecurity**

<b>State Plans, Priorities, Initiatives</b>	<b>Recommendations, Priorities, Initiatives</b>
<p><a href="#">Nebraska Statewide Cybersecurity Plan</a> (February 2023) and State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program</p>	<p>The Nebraska Statewide Cybersecurity Plan’s overall objective is to reduce cyber risk while enhancing Nebraska’s State and Local government cyber resilience.</p> <p>The State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP) provides funding to states and local governments to assess and improve cybersecurity. The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is administering Nebraska’s SLCGP. Nebraska was allocated \$2,555,930 for FY 2022 and \$5,188,485 for FY 2023. Eighty percent of total state allocations must support local entities, and 25% of that 80% must support rural entities.</p>
Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals and Strategies	<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals 2 and 4 support investments in rural and local government cybersecurity infrastructure, policies, procedures, and training.</p> <p><b>Goal 2:</b> Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.</p> <p><b>Strategy 2.2:</b> Increase awareness of accessibility issues with state agency and local government websites.</p>

	<p><b>Goal 4:</b> Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.</p> <p><b>Strategy 4.1:</b> Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.</p> <p><b>Strategy 4.2:</b> Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.</p>
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**Delivery of Other Essential Services**

<b>State Plans, Priorities, Initiatives</b>	<b>Recommendations, Priorities, Initiatives</b>
<p>Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service State Unit on Aging <a href="#">Nebraska State Plan on Aging Oct. 1, 2023-Sept. 30, 2017 Draft</a></p>	<p>The draft Nebraska State Plan on Aging includes the following goal:  <b>Goal 4:</b> Support and promote long-term services and supports for persons in all living arrangements.</p> <p>The plan describes two ways that internet access could support services at senior centers and Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs):  <i>The State Unit on Aging (SUA) conducted a multiple-question survey for 145 multi-purpose senior centers across the state of Nebraska. The senior centers received introductory instruction along with an electronic link to the survey and a paper copy. The survey was initiated in July of 2022 and completed by September. There were 127 multi-purpose senior centers that completed this survey. The greatest needed amenity for multi-purpose senior centers was having computers available for participants, followed by tele-learning. Challenges included low attendance, funding, and staffing.</i>  <i>The demand for expanded broadband systems across Nebraska has also created a need to update food service systems and more specifically, in areas that have internet access, the ability to utilize bar code scanning. Some AAAs within Nebraska have utilized this technology at senior centers. The use of barcodes to check into a center helps to keep track of services, eases the burden of paper records, and has the potential to keep suggested contributions/ services confidential and protected from theft. The SUA will assist AAAs in any way possible to incorporate more technology and barcode scanning systems within the senior centers. This continues to be a goal across the state.</i></p>
<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals and Strategies</p>	<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goal 2 supports improving internet access in Nebraska senior centers.</p> <p><b>Goal 2:</b> Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.  <b>Strategy 2.1:</b> Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.</p>
<p>Nebraska DHHS <a href="#">ACCESSNebraska/iServe Nebraska</a></p>	<p>DHHS administers and manages eligibility for Medicaid and Economic Assistance programs through ACCESSNebraska which is being transformed to iServe Nebraska. Those with internet access, access to a device, and digital skills are better able to access the system.</p>
<p>Nebraska Digital Equity Plan Goals and Strategies</p>	<p>Multiple goals and strategies from the Nebraska Digital Equity Plan support better equipping and preparing those applying for economic assistance programs and managing their enrollment.</p>

	<p><b>Goal 1:</b> Increase the percent of Nebraska households with affordable, quality broadband service.  <b>Strategy 1.1:</b> Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.</p> <p><b>Goal 2:</b> Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.  <b>Strategy 2.1:</b> Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.  <b>Strategy 2.2:</b> Increase awareness of accessibility issues with state agency and local government websites.</p> <p><b>Goal 3:</b> Increase the percentage of Nebraska households with applicable internet devices.  <b>Strategy 3.1:</b> Address barriers to the development or expansion of programs which refurbish and repair digital devices and/or distribute new devices to members of covered populations.</p> <p><b>Goal 4:</b> Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.  <b>Strategy 4.1:</b> Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.  <b>Strategy 4.2:</b> Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.</p>
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## Civic Engagement

Access to the internet is essential for civic engagement. The Nebraska Legislature’s website includes information on bills which have been introduced, hearing schedules, and instructions for resident submission of testimony for legislative hearings online. Information on state government programs and services is available online. Many local governments also have information on their services and programs, budgets, and local ordinances online. In addition to providing information on websites, many state agencies and local governments also use social media to engage with residents. To provide information online and engage with constituents, local governments need to ensure that their websites, social media posts, and other digital media are accessible and that they are using appropriate privacy and security practices. Residents with internet access, access to appropriate devices, and digital skills are better able to access government systems and information at all levels.

Multiple goals and strategies from the Nebraska Digital Equity Plan support civic engagement:

**Goal 1:** Increase the proportion of Nebraska households with affordable, quality broadband service.

**Strategy 1.1:** Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.

**Goal 2:** Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.

**Strategy 2.1:** Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.

**Strategy 2.2:** Increase awareness of accessibility issues with state agency and local government websites.

**Goal 3:** Increase the percentage of Nebraska households with applicable internet devices.

**Strategy 3.1:** Address barriers to the development or expansion of programs which refurbish and repair digital devices and/or distribute new devices to members of covered populations.

**Goal 4:** Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.

**Strategy 4.1:** Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.

**Strategy 4.2:** Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.

**Goal 5:** Increase the use of telehealth technologies in Nebraska to increase access to care in underserved areas and to reduce health disparities.

**Strategy 5.1:** Support efforts by Nebraska hospitals, healthcare providers, associations, and other stakeholders to increase the use of telehealth in Nebraska.



Broadband Director Patrick Haggerty gives an update on the Nebraska Broadband Office and the BEAD grant to the participants of the State Digital Opportunities Planning Workshop in Kearney on August 8, 2023. Photo by Clint Mangen, Nebraska Department of Transportation.

## 2.3 Strategies & Objectives [Requirement 2]

### Broadband Affordability and Availability

**Goal 1: Increase the proportion of Nebraska households with access to affordable, quality broadband service.**

**Strategy 1.1: Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.**

**Key Performance Indicator 1.1:** % locations with 100/20 broadband available (served locations).

**Baseline:** 97% (includes locations with enforceable commitments).

**Near-term Target 2026:** BEAD subgrants executed, covering 100% of unserved and underserved locations.

**Long-term Target 2029:** 100%

**Strategy 1.2: Using outreach, advocacy, and education, increase the number of broadband providers in Nebraska offering affordable plans for low-income and middle-class households.**

**Key Performance Indicator 1.2:** % of customers reporting they can afford broadband service and it is available to them (2021 ACS 5-year Estimates Table S2802).

**Baseline:** varies across covered populations – see table, below

**Near-term Target 2026:** see table, below

**Long-term Target 2029:** see table, below

Population	Availability			Affordability		
	Baseline	Short-term target 2026	Long-term target 2029	Baseline	Short-term target 2026	Long-term target 2029
Low income	72%	BEAD Subgrants executed, covering 100% of unserved and underserved locations	100%	82.7%	BEAD Subgrants executed, covering 100% of unserved and underserved locations	100%
65 years and older	76%		100%	95.8%		100%
Incarcerated	^		100%	^		100%
Veterans	76%		100%	87.0%		100%
Disabled	80%		100%	88.0%		100%
LEP/NEP	80%		100%	*88.4		100%
Racial ethnic minority	90%		100%	86.0%		100%
Rural	84%		100%	90.6%		100%

\* Data not available, so an estimate was used based on an average of the rates for the other covered populations. The baseline and targets will be updated once a baseline is established.

^ Availability and affordability metrics for incarcerated populations are necessarily different, as they do not control their own funds or access to devices. Therefore, in discussion with NDCS, the following metrics were adopted. Each of these is intended to address both availability and affordability for incarcerated people.

**Key Performance Indicator 1.3:** % of correctional facilities with controlled internet access for inmates.

**Baseline:** 100%

**Short-term Target 2026:** 100%

**Long-term Target 2029:** 100%

**Key Performance Indicator 1.4:** # of reentry programs which provide a pre-paid mobile phone with one month of service.

**Baseline:** 3

**Short-term Target 2026:** 4

**Long-term Target 2029:** 5

## Online Accessibility of Public Resources

**Goal 2: Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.**

**Strategy 2.1: Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.**

**Key Performance Indicator 2.1:** % of libraries with fiber connections.

**Baseline:** 63%

**Near-term Target 2026:** 70%

**Long-term Target 2029:** 75%

**Strategy 2.2: Increase awareness of accessibility issues with state agency and local government websites.**

**Key Performance Indicator 2.2:** % confident about searching for information about government services or resources (Nebraska Digital Skills and Access Survey).

**Baseline:** varies across covered populations – see table, below

**Near-term Target 2026:** see table, below

**Long-term Target 2029:** see table, below

Population	Baseline	Short-term Target 2026	Long-term Target 2029
Low income	49%	51%	53%
65 years and older	67%	69%	71%
Incarcerated	^		
Veterans	65%	67%	69%
Disabled	60%	62%	64%
LEP/NEP	*57%	59%	61%
Racial ethnic minority	36%	38%	40%
Rural	65%	67%	69%

\* Data not available, so an estimate was used based on an average of the rates for the other covered populations. The baseline and targets will be updated once a baseline is established.

^ Metrics for incarcerated populations are necessarily different, as access and availability of digital service, devices, and skills are largely in control of NDCS. In discussion with NDCS, the following metric was adopted.

**Key Performance Indicator 2.3:** # of facilities which allow incarcerated people to access employment websites.

**Baseline:** 2

**Short-term Target 2026:** 3

**Long-term Target 2029:** 3

## Digital Device Access

**Goal 3: Increase the percentage of Nebraska households with applicable internet devices.**

**Strategy 3.1: Address barriers to the development or expansion of programs which refurbish and repair digital devices and/or distribute new devices to members of covered populations.**

**Key Performance Indicator 3.1:** # of student-lead programs working on refurbishment and/or repair of digital devices.

**Baseline:** one, at MCC in Omaha

**Near-term Target 2026:** 3, in different parts of the state

**Long-term Target 2029:** 5, in different parts of the state

**Key Performance Indicator 3.2:** % of households with one or more digital devices (2020 ACS 5-

Year estimates microdata)

**Baseline:** varies across covered populations – see table, below

**Near-term Target 2026:** see table, below

**Long-term Target 2029:** see table, below

Population	% of population with desktop/laptop			% of population with a smartphone		
	Baseline	Short-term Target 2026	Long-term Target 2029	Baseline	Short-term Target 2026	Long-term Target 2029
Low income	53%	55%	57%	80.9%	83.0%	85.0%
65 years and older	85.1%	87.0%	89.0%	65.6%	68.0%	70.0%
Incarcerated	^			^		
Veterans	80.5%	83.0%	85.0%	59.6%	62.0%	64.0%
Disabled	69.4%	71.0%	73.0%	68.8%	71.0%	73.0%
LEP/NEP	51.0%	53.0%	55.0%	80.0%	82.0%	84.0%
Racial ethnic minority	75.0%	77.0%	79.0%	87.6%	90.0%	92.0%
Rural	73.5%	75.0%	77.0%	84.4%	86.0%	88.0%

^ Metrics for incarcerated populations are necessarily different, as access and availability of digital service, devices, and skills are largely in control of NDCS. In discussion with NDCS, the following metrics were adopted.

**Key Performance Indicator 3.3:** % of incarcerated people with access to a digital device while incarcerated.

**Baseline:** 100%

**Short-term Target 2026:** 100%

**Long-term Target 2029:** 100%

## Digital Literacy & Privacy and Security

**Goal 4: Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.**

**Strategy 4.1: Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.**

**Key Performance Indicator 4.1:** # of digital navigators across Nebraska.

**Baseline:** No organized efforts related to digital navigators.

**Near-term Target 2026:** At least one digital navigation program, coalition, and/or other structure to support the workforce created.

**Long-term Target 2029:** At least two digital navigation programs, coalitions, and/or other structures to support the workforce created.

**Strategy 4.2: Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.**

**Key Performance Indicator 4.2:** # of digital privacy and security skills 50% or more of each covered population (except for incarcerated people – see below) is very confident they can complete (out of 4 skills) (Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey)

**Baseline:** 0

**Near-term Target 2026:** 1

**Long-term Target 2029:** 2

Metrics for incarcerated populations are necessarily different, as access and availability of digital service, devices, and skills are largely in control of NDCS. In discussion with NDCS, the following metric was adopted.

**Key Performance Indicator 4.3:** # of re-entry programs that include privacy and security training.

**Baseline:** 1

**Short-term Target 2026:** 2

**Long-term Target 2029:** 3

**Goal 5: Increase the use of telehealth technologies in Nebraska to increase access to care in underserved areas and to reduce health disparities.**

**Strategy 5.1: Support efforts by Nebraska hospitals, healthcare providers, associations, and other stakeholders to increase the use of telehealth in Nebraska.**

**Key Performance Indicator 5.1:** % of respondents to NTIA Internet Use Survey that report they use the internet for health monitoring, communication with healthcare providers and/or accessing health records or information.

**Baseline:** 35% (CPS Computer and Internet Use Supplement 202111)

**Near-term Target 2026:** 40%

**Long-term Target 2029:** 45%

### 3 Current State of Digital Equity: Barriers and Assets

#### 3.1 Asset Inventory [Requirement 8]

Digital inclusion assets were inventoried by the state’s economic development districts and their regional digital equity planning committees as well as the state digital equity team. Links to these asset inventories are included in the appendix. Additionally, the Nebraska Library Commission (NLC) provided information from its annual Public Library Survey and a supplemental survey on digital inclusion assets, activities, and barriers. Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) State Unit on Aging (SUA) shared their survey of senior centers in Nebraska. Several key resources are highlighted in this section.

#### 3.1.1 Digital Inclusion Assets by Covered Population

##### A. Assets for People with Low Incomes

##### 1. Affordable Connectivity Program

Nearly 89,000 households out of 284,439 eligible households (31%) in Nebraska have enrolled in the FCC’s ACP. Nebraska’s enrollment rate is higher than six of our neighboring states but lags the U.S. participation rate of 39%. Funding for ACP is expected to be exhausted in April 2024 unless Congress reappropriates funding for the program.

SENDD received a grant from the Federal Communications Commission to promote ACP and increase enrollment numbers in Nebraska. SENDD partnered with the other EDDs to reach each part of the state through informed outreach to Nebraska’s distinct communities. SENDD’s outreach includes building partnerships with community-based organizations that provide direct services to qualifying participants and conducting presentations filled with resources and best ACP outreach practices. Many social service agencies also provide information on the program and assistance in enrolling.

#### Percent of Eligible Households Enrolled in Affordable Connectivity Program

August 2023

[Education Superhighway ACP Enrollment Tracker](#)

Geography	Percent of Eligible Households Enrolled	Geography	Percent of Eligible Households Enrolled
Colorado	28%	Nebraska	31%
Iowa	22%	South Dakota	16%
Kansas	28%	Wyoming	24%
Missouri	35%	United States	39%

##### 2. Center for People

Lincoln’s Center for People offers EduTech, a free educational program focused on preparing students for a career in the well-paid, growing area of technology. EduTech uses curriculum developed by Google and will enroll 40 participants each year.

##### 3. Metropolitan Community College Digital Express

Digital Express located on MCC’s North Omaha campus is open to everyone, but it is in an area with a high proportion of low-income and racial ethnic minority residents. The program’s offerings include technology checkout and support, low-cost technology repair, and basic technology programs/training.

#### **4. Do Space Tech Pack Program**

With funding from the Emergency Connectivity Fund from the FCC, 945 low-income Omaha residents received a computing device and free internet access for one year from Do Space from June 30, 2022, to June 29, 2023. Additionally, participants received computer basics training and technology tutoring. Although the program has ended, the program evaluation demonstrated the positive impact that having a device, internet access, and training can have on low-income families.

#### **5. Capital Projects Funding for Multi-Purpose Community Centers**

Nebraska DED will administer \$35 million in Capital Projects funding for multi-purpose community centers which enable work, education, and health monitoring in qualified census tracts in Omaha.

#### **6. Made New Makerspace**

The nonprofit Made New Makerspace provides free 4G LTE modems with included internet service and refurbished laptop computers to underserved youth, through a program called Laptops for Learners.

### **B. Assets for Older Adults**

#### **1. AARP Nebraska**

AARP Nebraska has attended multiple community meetings and contributed ideas and support to digital equity efforts. They will continue to partner to address the needs of older adults regarding the affordability and availability of broadband as well as promoting opportunities for adults to learn technology skills and privacy and security practices.

#### **2. Older Adults Technology Services and Senior Planet**

Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) aims to empower older adults with the tools and training necessary to take advantage of technology and use it to enrich their lives. Through its flagship program, Senior Planet from AARP, OATS offers online classes on using technology and other topics. Digital Express at MCC and Goodwill Omaha have Senior Planet site licenses. Senior Planet is also available to Nebraska residents, virtually via SeniorPlanet.org and via a National Tech Hotline.

#### **3. GetSetUp**

The Nebraska State Unit on Aging (SUA) has teamed up with GetSetUp to provide hundreds of live online classes to keep older adults mentally, physically, and socially active. Classes on using technology and other topics are offered.

#### **4. Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and Senior Centers**

AAAs provide information and assistance on available services and advocate for needed or improved services for older adults, people with disabilities of all ages, and their caregivers. Nebraska has eight AAAs:

- Aging Office of Western Nebraska
- Aging Partners AAA & ADRC
- Blue Rivers AAA & Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)
- Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging & ADRC
- Midland AAA& ADRC

- Northeast Nebraska AAA & ADRC
- South Central Nebraska AA & ADRC
- West Central Nebraska AAA

Nebraska’s 145 multi-purpose senior centers can be resources for older adults. The SUA surveyed senior centers in 2022 and found:

- 67% of multi-purpose senior centers provide Wi-Fi for everyone
- 30% of multi-purpose community centers provide computer access for everyone

Many senior centers that do not currently provide these services also indicated an interest in providing these services in the future:

### **5. Cyber Seniors**

AARP provided funding for this program offered at DoSpace, which assists senior citizens to get their technology questions answered.

## **C. Assets for Incarcerated People**

### **1. Vocational and Life Skills Program**

Each year the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) grants \$3.5 million to provide community-based opportunities for people who are in prison, discharged from prison, or serving a period of supervision on parole or probation. Funding for the Vocational and Life Skills (VLS) program is intended to address barriers to successful reentry and reducing recidivism. Several of the VLS programs provide recently released individuals with a pre-paid phone so that they can communicate with prospective employers and their parole officer. Assistance in using the phone is also provided if needed.

**ReConnect, Inc.** has provided approximately 75 phones to recently released individuals through September 2023. The phones make it possible for employers to contact individuals directly.

**RISE** is the largest nonprofit organization in Nebraska focused solely on rehabilitative programming in prisons and reentry support. RISE offers three different programs inside and in the community. RISE has distributed at least 150 phones to recently incarcerated individuals.

**MCC’s 180 Re-entry Assistance Program (180 RAP)** serves over 1,000 incarcerated, recently released, and people involved with problem-solving courts per year. Among other services, the program offers a two-hour digital literacy class is offered weekly. Participants can take the class six times when they are incarcerated and can take it as often as they need after they are released. 180 RAP also provides a pre-paid phone for newly released individuals.

**The Center for People’s Opening Doors, formerly known as TRADE,** is a community re-entry program focused on providing practical training to translate new and existing abilities into re-entry success. Participants may choose job-skill training in Microsoft Office computer classes courses through ToolingU.com.

## **D. Assets for Veterans**

### **1. Veterans Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC)**

Veterans may be eligible for the Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) program that matches veterans with a leading training provider to help them develop high-tech skills in one of the following areas:

- Computer software
- Computer programming
- Data processing
- Information science
- Media applications

## **2. Digital Divide Consult**

The Digital Divide Consult is a process that connects veterans with programs and resources that provide internet service or technology needed for Veteran's Administration (VA) visits. The program allows the VA care team to refer veterans to social workers who will assist them with internet and technology options, such as:

- **Connected Devices Program.** Lends eligible veterans internet-connected tablets at no cost so they can access VA care through telehealth. Help with initial device set up and 24/7 tech support is provided.
- **Mobile Carrier Partnerships.** The Department of Veteran's Affairs has partnered with AT&T, SafeLink by TracFone, T-Mobile, and Verizon to help veterans avoid data charges when using VA Video Connect to meet with their VA providers

## **3. Clinical Resource Hubs**

Clinical Resource Hubs are established at all the VA's 18 healthcare networks to offer a combination of in-person care and telehealth services.

## **4. VA Apps**

Several apps are available to help veterans, healthcare professionals, and family members. Apps for veterans include VA: Health and Benefits, VA Health Chat (for use with the Omaha VA Medical Center and Sidney Clinic), and VA Online Scheduling.

## **E. Assets for People with Disabilities**

### **1. Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP)**

ATP is part of the Department of Education that connects Nebraskans to opportunities through assistive technology. ATP has offices in Lincoln, Kearney, Norfolk, Omaha, and Scottsbluff.

### **2. iCanConnect (iCC)**

The National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program, known as iCanConnect, is a federally funded program coordinated by the Nebraska Department of Education. People who have significant combined vision and hearing loss can receive telecommunication equipment and training.

### **3. Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS)**

The Nebraska Telecommunications Relay Service program provides access to telecommunications services and equipment for individuals who are hearing, speech impaired, or deaf/blind impaired.

### **4. Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) offers several services, including provision of assistive listening devices in behavioral health facilities, an assistive devices loan program, and licensing of sign language interpreters.

### ***5. Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired***

The Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) provides Vocational Rehabilitation Services to assist blind and low-vision Nebraskans to enter the workforce, retain employment, and advance in their chosen career fields. This may include purchasing computer technology. Employment retention services, such as mobility and technology training, are also available.

NCBVI's Technology Program provides technology services to blind and visually impaired Nebraskans, as well as current and potential employers of people who are blind. Technology Specialists instruct NCBVI consumers in the use of access technologies such as screen reading software, refreshable Braille displays, screen magnification software, and personal note taking devices. In addition, instruction is provided in the use of mainstream technologies such as web browsing, use of smartphones and tablets, the Windows and Macintosh/Apple operating systems, and word processing skills consumers need to achieve their vocational goals.

### ***6. Great Plains Americans with Disabilities Act Center***

The Great Plains ADA Center provides information, guidance and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act and related laws in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. Services are designed to meet the needs of a wide range of users, from individuals with disabilities and their families to architects, building code officials, educators, state and local governments, and businesses.

### ***7. Disability Rights Nebraska***

Disability Rights Nebraska is the protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in Nebraska. Disability Rights Nebraska protects, supports, and promotes the rights of people with disabilities. This includes people with just about any disability including intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental illness, and physical disabilities.

## **F. Assets for People with Language Barriers**

### ***1. Adult Education Programs at Community Colleges and Other Locations***

Adult Education General Education Diploma (GED) programs include computer literacy education components. Nebraska has 40 Adult Education Class sites.

### ***2. Cultural Centers***

Cultural centers such as the Intercultural Senior Center in Omaha and Centro Hispano have computers and internet access for individuals to use.

### ***3. Lincoln Literacy Center Computer Literacy Classes***

Lincoln Literacy Center offers beginning and intermediate-level computer literacy classes which cover how to type, use a keyboard, and use a mouse/mouse pad. Participants work on understanding how to use the internet, email, and social media. Classes also explore Google Suite and Microsoft Office depending on student interest and skill level.

## **G. Assets for Racial Ethnic Minorities & Native Americans**

### ***1. Tribal Programs***

Tribal entities in Nebraska have been awarded several grants to address digital equity. Additional grants for broadband deployment are described in the Broadband Adoption Assets section.

- The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska received a \$167,504 grant from the Treasury Capital Projects program to renovate a multipurpose community facility to provide internet access.
- The Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC) received a \$2,938,816 grant from NTIA’s Connecting Minority Communities Program. Funds will support hiring of staff to expand the school Information Technology department; increase campus cybersecurity; obtain and distribute laptops and hotspots for students and community stakeholders; and purchase software for improved distance learning.
- The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska received a received a \$167,504 grant from the Treasury Capital Projects program to purchase technology that enables Tribal members to access the internet.
- The Santee Sioux Nation received a \$167,504 grant from the Treasury Capital Projects program to renovate a multipurpose community facility to provide internet access.
- The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska received a \$167,504 grant from the Treasury Capital Projects program to connect Tribal-owned buildings, enhancing broadband access for the entire community.

Additionally, the Center for Rural Affairs has launched a makerspace on NICC campuses in Macy and Santee for making, learning, exploring, and sharing.

## **2. Cultural Centers**

Cultural centers such as the Intercultural Senior Center in Omaha and Centro Hispano have computers and internet access for individuals to use.

## **H. Assets for Rural Residents**

### **1. Nebraska Farm Bureau**

Nebraska Farm Bureau has participated in discussions about rural broadband availability and has partnered with Starlink to provide a discount for its members.

### **2. Rural Broadband Task Force**

Nebraska’s Rural Broadband Task Force has been effective in identifying needs and barriers related to broadband in rural areas and recommending strategies to address these needs.

### **3. Pro Ag Grant Program**

The Nebraska Legislature created the Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant (PRO-AG) Program in 2022, appropriating \$1 million a year for two years for the program. Half of the funding would be allocated for wireless farm connectivity projects. NPSC opened a grant round in January 2024.

### **4. Nebraska DHHS Office of Rural Health (ORH)**

Both the Nebraska DHHS ORH and Nebraska Rural Health Association are advocates for the use of telehealth in Nebraska. The ORH promotes the development of a healthcare system that assures the availability and accessibility of quality healthcare services to meet the needs of people living in rural Nebraska. The ORH develops state rural health policy in consultation with the Rural Health Advisory Commission.

### **5. Nebraska Rural Health Association**

The Nebraska Rural Health Association includes a variety of medical professionals and organizations invested in the wellness of rural Nebraskans.

### **6. State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program**

The State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program (SLCGP) provides funding to states and local governments to assess and improve cybersecurity. The Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) administers the program, which awarded 43 subawards in 2023. The 2024 application window closed in February.

## **I. Assets for All Nebraskans**

### **1. Nebraska Broadband Office**

NBO administers the BEAD Program and took on responsibility for Digital Equity efforts in January 2024. NBO also developed and maintains the Nebraska Broadband Map.

### **2. NITC/Office of the CIO (OCIO)**

NITC promotes the use of information technology in education, healthcare, economic development, and all levels of government service. It has advisory groups including the Technical Panel, Community Council, eHealth Council, Education Council, and GIS Council. NITC/OCIO also manages the state education network, Network Nebraska.

### **3. Nebraska Public Service Commission (NPSC)**

NPSC administers the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Grant Program/Capital Projects Fund, Precision Agriculture Infrastructure Grant (PRO-AG) Program, and the Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF), which includes the High-cost Program, and E-Rate Special Construction Matching Program, among others.

### **4. Nebraska Attorney General's Office**

The Nebraska Attorney General's Office provides free educational sessions on online privacy and security to community groups.

### **5. Nebraska Library Commission**

NLC is working with Nebraska libraries to build capacity to engage in digital equity activities. NLC is addressing barriers that libraries face to migration to fiber connections. NLC is also offering free Domain Name System (DNS) filter access, centrally managed by NLC staff and complaint with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA). NLC also provides free assessments of network infrastructure to libraries, especially those that are considering installing a fiber connection. NLC offers support to libraries by providing some new network equipment (routers, switches, and Wi-Fi mesh equipment), and assistance with network configurations.

Additionally, NLC is encouraging libraries without fiber connectivity to take advantage of filing for E-Rate Special Construction funding, which includes matching funds to provide fiber at zero cost to the library. This has included training sessions as well as personal contacts by NLC staff. NLC has also collaborated with the Nebraska Regional Officials Council (NROC) to inform and encourage community leaders and local government officials to utilize the Special Construction model to bring fiber to libraries that currently do not have it. This enables communities opportunities to expand fiber connectivity to local businesses and residences.

## **6. Nebraska Libraries**

Libraries are key community partners in promoting digital equity across the state. Nebraska has 273 public libraries with 78% of libraries having a service population size of 2,499 or less. About 65% (177 of Nebraska's 273) of all Nebraska public libraries offer fiber connections and Wi-Fi for patrons.

NLC prepared and sent an asset inventory survey to the public library directors. The response rate was 69%, with 188 responses received. Highlights from the survey included the following:

- The average monthly internet cost for libraries was \$110. After E-Rate discounts, libraries reported a cost of \$52/month.
- Libraries had an average of 8 hardwired computers available for public use, and an average of 4 laptops, Chromebooks, or tablet computers.
- Libraries had an average of 1 computer (laptop, Chromebook, or tablet) that circulated to the public (available for use outside the library building).
- 182 or 97% offered free Wi-Fi.
- 147 or 78% had Wi-Fi extended outside of the library building.
- 170 or 90% reported that they left Wi-Fi on during hours the library was not open to the public.
- For IT support:
  - 37 or 20% have library staff available
  - 72 or 39% have contracted, city, or outside staff available
  - 18 or 10% have volunteer staff available
- 108 or 58% offer digital equity training (formal or informal) to the public.

## **7. Nebraska Regional Officials Council (NROC)/Economic Development Districts (EDDs)**

NROC is the statewide organization of Nebraska's eight EDDs:

- Central Nebraska Economic Development District (CNEDD)
- Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA)
- Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District (NENEDD)
- Panhandle Area Development District (PADD)
- Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council (SIMPCO)
- South Central Economic Development District (SCEDD)
- Southeast Nebraska Development District (SENDD)
- West Central Nebraska Development District (WCNDD)

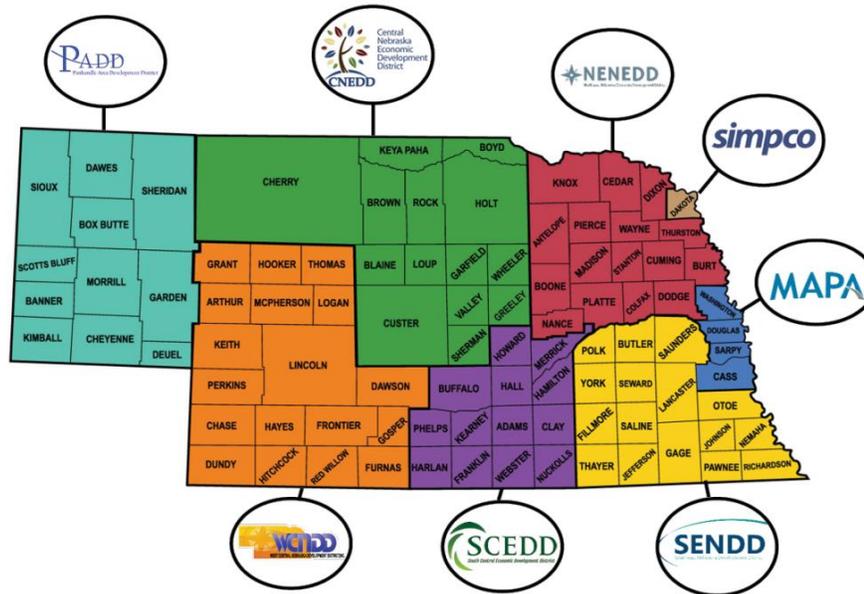
The state's EDDs formed regional digital equity committees to conduct asset inventories, identify barriers, and develop regional digital equity plans. SENDD has also applied for funding from the USDA Rural Broadband Technical Assistance grant program.

## **8. League of Nebraska Municipalities (LONM)**

LONM represents the interests of member municipalities and empowers municipal officials to shape the destiny of their municipality and improve the quality of life of their citizens. LONM has been engaged in discussions about improving broadband availability, expanding digital inclusion efforts, and addressing the security of municipal websites.

### 9. Nebraska Association of County Officials

The Nebraska Association of County Officials (NACO) is a nonprofit organization that has been engaged in discussions about improving broadband availability, expanding digital inclusion efforts, and addressing the security of municipal websites.



Source: NROC Website

### 10. Nebraska Broadband Providers

Many Nebraska broadband providers are participating in ACP, offer low-cost programs, and/or are engaging in additional digital inclusion efforts.

### 11. Nebraska Community Colleges

Nebraska has six community colleges located throughout the state which provide adult education and credit and non-credit technology training. They can also work with employers on training programs that meet their workforce needs. Courses are available in various software programs, fiber optics, information technology topics, cybersecurity, health information management, and web development, among others.

Community colleges in Nebraska granted 422 computer and information sciences degrees and 326 engineering degrees in 2021-2022 according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

### 12. University of Nebraska System

The University of Nebraska contributes to digital inclusion efforts in several ways. The University of Nebraska at Omaha Center for Public Affairs Research and Department of Gerontology conducted four focus groups targeting covered populations as part of the Nebraska State Digital Equity Planning Grant. In addition, a researcher at the University of Nebraska Department of Agricultural Economics surveyed over 1,500 people on their digital access and skills as part of the grant.

In October 2023, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) launched a partnership with tech company SkillStorm to provide online, non-credit education, including some free courses, in growing computer technology related areas. Through SkillStorm's training platform, UNL will offer a range of courses that lead to tech skills credentials in today's most in-demand areas, including AWS, CompTIA, Salesforce, Appian, and Pega.

UNL also conducts research on precision agriculture and is developing a master's degree program in Internet of Things (IoT). University of Nebraska Extension is involved in community development efforts across the state and is a potential partner in digital equity programs.

Graduates of the University of Nebraska system make up a significant portion of the state's STEM workforce, especially in engineering. In 2021-2022, the University of Nebraska system awarded 478 computer science degrees and 760 engineering degrees.

### ***13. State and Private Colleges & Universities***

The nine state and private colleges in Nebraska also offer computer science degrees and awarded 614 degrees in computer and information sciences and support services in 2021-2022. Available programs include computer information systems, computer science, cybersecurity, and data science.

### ***14. Nebraska Career Scholarships***

The Nebraska Career Scholarship Act provides scholarships to students at the University of Nebraska, Nebraska state colleges, community colleges, or private postsecondary institutions pursuing degrees in programs of study leading to high wage, high-skill, and high-demand careers. Eligible programs include healthcare, computer information systems, engineering, and those in a skilled trade or identified shortage area. Each scholarship recipient is required to register with the appropriate campus office to obtain a Nebraska-based internship, apprenticeship, clinical position, or employment in a field related to their program of study before they graduate.

### ***15. Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) Programs***

NDED funds several workforce development programs including:

- **Customized Job Training grant program**, which provides assistance for employee training to businesses that create or retain quality jobs in Nebraska, including funding for on-the-job training; classroom training, onsite or at a local community college; and tuition and fees, training manuals, and other reasonable costs.
- **Developing Youth Talent Initiative**, which creates collaboration between Nebraska businesses and public schools and connects young Nebraskans to learning opportunities in the workforce that can play an important role in their decision to build their careers in our state.

### ***16. InternNE, Powered by Aksarben***

InternNE, powered by Aksarben initiative, previously recognized as the Intern Nebraska Grant Program, is a \$20 million collaborative effort between the Aksarben Foundation and NDED. The program aims to connect students and employers statewide by reimbursing eligible internship expenses. Although this is not exclusively a technology program, it is an important resource for developing a tech workforce in Nebraska.

### **17. Nebraska Department of Education and Local School Districts**

NDE promotes the use of current and emerging technologies through initiatives and partnerships that expand opportunities for learning beyond the boundaries of the school and classroom. Nebraska's 454 school districts serve 327,055 students. Nearly all (97%) high schools and 83% of K-8 programs provide digital devices for all students.

### **18. 4-H Tech Changemakers**

The 4-H Tech Changemakers program trains and equips teens to bring digital skills trainings to their communities. Through the program these young people are helping their communities thrive by advocating for increased digital inclusion and providing access to in-demand digital skills.

### **3.1.2 Existing Digital Equity Plans**

Seven regional digital equity plans were developed by the state's economic development districts as part of the State Digital Equity planning process. The planning process included developing a shared understanding of issues related to digital equity and opportunities through a series of webinars, meetings, outreach sessions, and a state planning workshop. Links to the plans are included in the Appendices.

The digital equity planning team is not aware of any written municipal or county digital equity plans.

When the state digital equity planning team met with Tribal representatives as part of the Tribal Consultations, the representatives of the four Nebraska Tribal governments indicated that they had applied for digital equity planning funding from the NTIA but were not able to develop written plans due to limited funding. During the Tribal Consultations, tribal representatives identified needs and potential strategies to address those needs. Needs included access to connectivity and devices for education, improved access to healthcare through telehealth technologies especially for elders, access to information and communication for emergencies, and connectivity for economic development opportunities. The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska discussed the challenges that individuals in poverty face in establishing and maintaining digital identities.

### **3.1.3 Existing Digital Equity Programs**

Digital Equity programming offered by Do Space and Metropolitan Community College Digital Express were described in the Assets for Individuals with Low Incomes section. There are several other programs in Nebraska, as well.

### **1. Makerspaces in Nebraska**

The NLC's database lists 57 makerspaces in the state, many of them in libraries. The prevalence of makerspaces in Nebraska libraries was spurred by a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. NLC partnered with the Nebraska Innovation Studio, the University of Nebraska's makerspace, on the project. Funding was used to purchase mobile makerspaces, which are hosted on a rotating basis by 35 rural and small libraries. Makers reported making and selling products, starting businesses, purchasing equipment, and gaining skills. Nearly all the libraries involved in the project have since created their own permanent makerspaces. The grant provided an innovative model that could be adapted for other digital equity programs.

## **2. Nebraska Tech Collaborative**

The Nebraska Tech Collaborative is an Aksarben workforce initiative convening leaders across the state to attract, develop, and retain tech talent and entrepreneurs to enable greater economic prosperity for Nebraska. The Nebraska Tech Collaborative has developed a data dashboard with information on Nebraska's tech workforce. The Nebraska Tech Collaborative has six programs:

- Scholars—Engaging Nebraska-based tech interns through peer and partner networking events
- Pioneers—Connecting Nebraska innovators to grow the startup ecosystem
- Engineers in Residence—Connecting engineers to startups for product development support
- Teacher Externships—Strengthening teachers' tech skills through an immersive summer experience
- Pitch Days—Connecting high-growth tech startups with Nebraska companies to pitch their products
- Laid Off Tech Worker Support—Streamlining placement of laid off tech workers in and out of the state

## **3. Nebraska Chamber Tech Nebraska**

Formed in 2023 in partnership with the Nebraska Chamber, Tech Nebraska will convene technology partners, foster a more diverse and inclusive technology workforce and advocate for pro-growth, tech-focused public policies.

## **4. AIM Institute**

The nonprofit AIM Institute provides training and resources for new and experienced tech professionals, making educational opportunities and career training accessible to all. Most of AIM's programming is focused on the Omaha area, although AIM has an Educational Opportunity Center in Scottsbluff offering assistance for people, especially veterans and first-generation students, looking to pursue postsecondary education. Programs include:

- Youth in Tech partners with multiple schools for technology education opportunities.
- The AIM Brain Exchange provides thousands of area youth with free, hands-on technology learning experiences.
- College and Tech Access programs include free workshops, academic support and advising services, after-school activities, and mentorship opportunities.
- AIM Code School offers accelerated training for high-demand tech skills to adults and career-changers. Led by industry experts, AIM Code School students gain access to a professional network.

## **5. Prairie STEM**

Prairie STEM's goal is to improve critical thinking and creativity in all students using STEM and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) integration to engage and provide hands-on learning for optimal impact and sustainability. Working with certified teachers, Prairie STEM creates and teaches customized lessons aligned with district-approved curriculum. Professional development and continuing education are available for teachers looking to fulfill career enrichment or new program implementation.

## **6. iFixAmerica**

iFixAmerica aims to build entrepreneurs and nurture the finest technicians in the country. They offer training for high-tech service jobs and support empowerment, entrepreneurship, and economic growth.

### **3.1.4 Broadband Adoption**

#### **A. Programs that Provide Digital Literacy and Digital Skills Training**

Several organizations and programs provide digital literacy and digital skills training, including:

- Nebraska Community Colleges including MCC Digital Express
- Do Space
- Prairie STEM
- AIM Institute
- Center for People in Need EduTech Program
- GetSetUp
- Senior Planet
- 108 or 58% of public libraries in Nebraska offer digital equity training (formal or informal) to the public. Sixteen or 9% of public libraries have partners to assist with digital equity programs.

#### **B. Programs that Provide Subsidized or Low-cost Devices**

Several programs in Nebraska provide subsidized or low-cost devices, including:

- Do Space Tech Pack Program
- PCs for People
- Some internet providers offer devices through ACP

#### **C. Digital Navigator Programs**

There are no full digital navigator programs in Nebraska, though several programs and organizations (e.g., libraries, community action agencies, and social service organizations) offer one or more of the services typically provided by these programs.

#### **D. Existing ISP Programs that Promote Adoption**

Most Nebraska broadband providers participate in ACP. We identified only eight small, rural telecommunications not participating in the program. Companies offering a \$30 low-cost program in Nebraska include:

- Allo Communications
- AT&T
- Cox Communications
- Frontier
- Google Fiber (currently building out in Omaha and Bellevue)
- Spectrum

Companies offering discounted devices include:

- Vistabeam
- NextLink
- Cox Communications
- Santee Communications

Several broadband providers have additional digital equity programs:

- Cox Communications offers several programs including the Cost2 Compete program which offers internet service for low-income families with students for \$9.95/month, a low-cost

option for low-income households, a partnership with PCs for People to provide low-cost devices, and the Cox Digital Academy which offers online digital learning resources. In addition, Cox Communications is collaborating with Internet2 and Network Nebraska through the ConnectEd Nebraska program to pilot expansion of eduroam access for participating K-12 schools across the Omaha metro area. The project will allow students to obtain internet connections across the metro area even when visiting locations outside their day-to-day school campuses.

- ALLO participates in ACP by offering a \$30 discount on any broadband service tier to qualifying households enrolled in the program and offers a 100/100 Mbps product completely free to qualifying households that are enrolled in the program. Through its Community Connect Program, ALLO is providing 10 years of free symmetrical 1 Gigabit broadband service to 75 nonprofit institutions in Nebraska. ALLO also regularly provides temporary area Wi-Fi at important community events. Recent examples have included the State Legion Baseball Tournament in Imperial, and the ZooFest music festival in Downtown Lincoln. In 2024, ALLO intends to launch a service in partnership with eduroam that will allow all Lincoln Public Schools-issued student devices to utilize excess bandwidth from nearby ALLO routers. This will help bridge the homework gap for students in households that may not have a home broadband connection. The goal is to ultimately implement this program in all ALLO communities that have a sufficient density of ALLO routers.
- Google Fiber awarded Do Space a grant to support digital equity and technology accessibility in the Omaha community. This support will enable Do Space to continue providing access to dozens of types of software made publicly available for free to the community, as well as provide a wide range of free technology education opportunities for adults throughout the year.
- Nextlink is a Microsoft Airband Partner. Benefits of the Airband partnership include access to technical expertise, digital skills training, and a free technical hotline for its customers through PCs for People, another Airband partner. Nextlink also collaborates with National 4-H, another Airband partner, to deliver a digital skills education program entitled Tech Changemakers, which empowers youth to train other community members on digital literacy. Additionally, Microsoft is providing a one-time \$25,000 grant to assist Nextlink in the establishment of digital navigator cohorts in strategic locations to help increase broadband adoption.
- Vistabeam is providing the Chappell Senior Center with a computer and accessories, which will allow seniors to take advantage of the Center's digital skills program. Two employees in the Chappell area will act as digital navigators who will learn the computer program modules, and then train others.
- The Northeast Nebraska Telephone Company applied for \$5,000 in funding from the National Telephone Cooperative Association (NTCA) Foundation for Rural Service to construct a telehealth room in the Clearwater Public Library.

### ***E. Public Computing Labs/Wi-Fi Access***

Do Space and MCC's Digital Express offer public computing labs and Wi-Fi access as well as other services. Public libraries are a key provider of public computing labs and Wi-Fi access. Approximately 65% of Nebraska's 273 public libraries have fiber optic connections. A survey of Nebraska libraries conducted by NLC found that:

- 95 or 41% of the 230 Nebraska libraries responding to the survey have makerspaces.
- 223 or 97% of responding libraries provide public Wi-Fi access.

Nebraska's 145 multi-purpose senior centers can be a resource for older adults. The SUA

surveyed senior centers in 2022 and found:

- 67% of multi-purpose senior centers provide Wi-Fi for everyone.
- 30% of multi-purpose community centers provide computer access for everyone.

### F. K-12 School System One-to-One Computer Programs

Nearly all (97%) of high schools and 83% of K-8 programs provide digital devices for all students.

### G. Computer Refurbishing Programs

Made New Makerspace provides free 4G LTE modems with included internet service and refurbished laptop computers to underserved youth, through a program called Laptops for Learners.

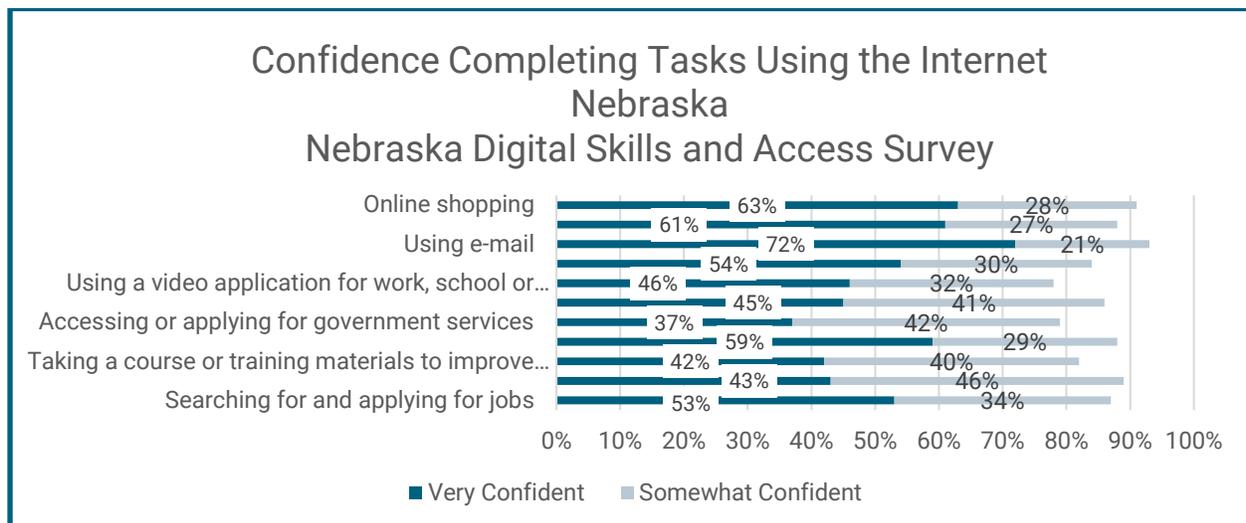
PCs for People does not have a physical presence in Nebraska. However, qualified individuals in Nebraska can order low-cost refurbished devices from the organization. Some Nebraska businesses donate their computers to PCs for People.

### H. Meaningful Use

The Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey found that over 80% of Nebraskans are very confident or somewhat confident in the following tasks:

- Online shopping
- Using social media
- Using e-mail
- Using a word processing application
- Finding educational content and information
- Accessing online banking or financial services
- Taking a course or training materials to improve job skills
- Finding reliable information about a health or medical condition
- Searching for and applying for jobs

Additionally, according to the USDA Technology Use (Farm Computer Usage and Ownership) survey, 55% of farmers and ranchers are using precision agriculture. Nebraska ranks second in the U.S. in the use of precision agriculture.



### **3.1.5 Broadband Affordability**

#### **A. ACP**

Nearly 89,000 households out of 284,439 eligible households (31%) in Nebraska have enrolled in ACP. Nebraska's enrollment rate is higher than six of our neighboring states but lags the U.S. participation rate of 39%.

As noted above, SENDD received a grant from FCC to promote ACP and increase enrollment numbers in Nebraska statewide. Many social service agencies also provide information on the program and assistance in enrolling. Funding for ACP is expected to be exhausted in April 2024 unless Congress reappropriates funding for the program.

#### **B. Broadband Plans for Low-income Consumers**

Multiple broadband providers in Nebraska currently offer broadband plans for low-income consumers. NBO is aware of the need for affordable broadband service in the state. According to data collected by the NPSC as part of the Capital Projects Fund and Nebraska Broadband Bridge Plan, the average cost of affordable plans has decreased over the past two years. However, the cost of broadband remains high for some, especially people who reside in rural parts of the state or only have one or two providers to choose from. To assess affordability for Nebraskans, data was collected by manually reviewing provider websites, analyzing data from NPSC, and reviewing the FCC Urban Rate Survey data from 2021, 2022, and 2023.

In BEAD subgrantee requirements, NBO will require that subgrantees offer plans to eligible households that provide typical speeds of at least 100 Mbps downstream, at least 20 Mbps upstream, and latency measurements of no more than 100 milliseconds. Eligibility for these plans will be tied to enrollment in ACP or successor programs, and all BEAD subgrantees will be required to participate in ACP or any successor program.

The annual rate for the low-cost affordable plan offered by providers must be 1% of 200% of the total 4-member household income of the federal poverty guidelines in 2023, inclusive of all taxes, fees, and charges. This equates to \$600 a year or \$50 a month. In addition, providers will be required to allow subscribers to apply the ACP benefit, or any state or federal successor plan, toward the low-cost plan. The proposed low-cost plan may not be subject to data caps, surcharges, usage-based throttling, service installation fees, activation fees, equipment purchase fees, or any other recurring or non-recurring fees that add to a customer rate. Also, if, after the establishment of its low-cost plan, the provider offers another low-cost plan with higher speeds, the provider will be required to permit its existing low-cost subscribers to upgrade to the new low-cost plan at no additional cost. All providers are encouraged to place links to information about the ACP in conspicuous locations on their websites.

#### **C. Middle Class Affordability Plans**

To establish a middle-class affordability plan, NBO must consider the current economic landscape in the State of Nebraska. According to the most recent American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in Nebraska in 2023 was \$66,644. NBO reviewed existing price plans for 100 Mbps offerings on Nebraska provider websites as well as data from the FCC Urban Rate Survey from 2021, 2022, and 2023. Based on this market analysis, NBO is documenting the current median rate at 2% of the median household income in Nebraska in 2023 for a 100 Mbps symmetrical service plan. This equates to \$1,332.88 a year or

\$111.07 a month. NBO encourages broadband providers to continue to strive to offer priority broadband service in this area of pricing. The proposed plan must also provide a latency of less than 100 milliseconds. The plan must not be subject to data caps, surcharges, or usage-based throttling and must be subject to the same acceptable use policies as all other subscribers to broadband services offered by the provider. NBO will require all providers to offer the middle-class plan across the BEAD-funded network but encourages providers to offer the plan to all customers. NBO understands the difference between business and residential plans for providers, and as a result the middle-class affordability plan is intended for residential customers. All providers should promote the availability of both the low-cost and middle-class affordability plans on their websites and through other promotional avenues.

### 3.2 Needs Assessment [Requirement 7]

The needs assessment draws from multiple sources of data, including:

- Publicly available data sources including the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, FCC broadband availability data, the Digital Equity Act Population Viewer, and USDA Farm and Computer Use Survey
- Input from 26 listening sessions and four tribal consultations held across Nebraska
- The Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey conducted by the University of Nebraska
- Four focus groups with members of covered populations conducted by the UNO Center for Public Affairs Research and the Department of Gerontology
- 14 webinars featuring 27 speakers
- 7 regional digital plans
- Statewide digital planning workshop
- Meetings with key stakeholders and resource providers

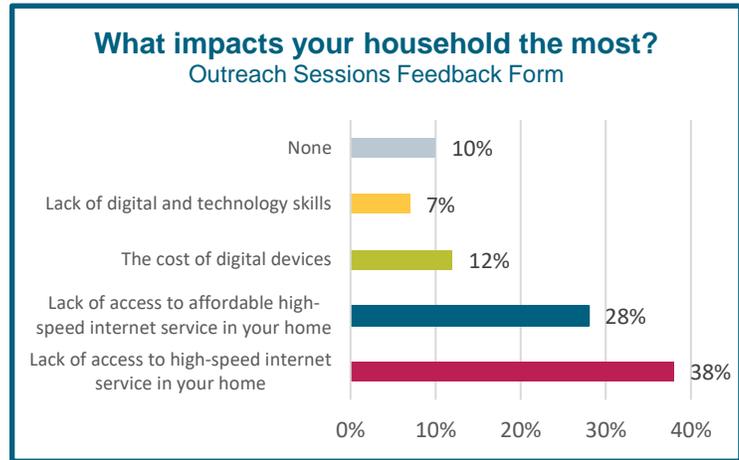


Participants at the Nebraska Broadband and Digital Equity listening session in Ord discuss privacy and

**Broadband availability and affordability were the two issues most frequently identified by participants in listening sessions across Nebraska.** NBO held 26 listening sessions across the state. Over 300 individuals attended the listening sessions and over 200 completed a feedback form. Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that lack of access to high-speed internet service in the home has a high impact on their community. Thirty-eight percent indicated that it has a high impact on their household.

Fifty-four percent of respondents indicated that lack of affordable high-speed internet access has a high impact on their community. Twenty-eight percent said that lack of access to affordable high-speed internet impacts their household.

Almost 97% of Nebraska locations and 67.8% of rural Nebraska locations have broadband of at least 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up according to NBO (February 2024). NBO has identified 8,848 underserved locations and 15,677 unserved locations.



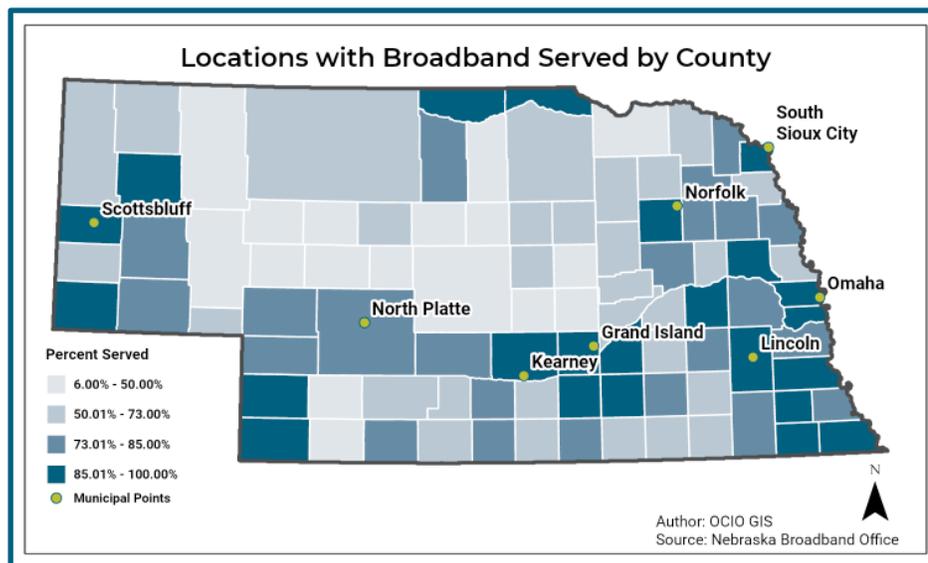
**Rural residents are the covered population which is most challenged by broadband availability.** Approximately 99% of the unserved and underserved locations in Nebraska are in rural areas. 82.15% of rural locations in Nebraska are served, compared to 98.6% of locations statewide.

### Served and Underserved Locations

February 2024

Measure	Nebraska	Rural Nebraska	Urban Nebraska
Broadband Serviceable Locations	797,960	420,117	377,843
Served Locations (100/20 or greater)	773,435	345,120	372,481
% Served Locations	96.93%	82.15%	98.58%
Underserved Locations (less than 100/20 but at least 25/3 available)	8,848	6,523	2,325
% Underserved Locations	1.11%	1.55%	0.62%

The map below shows the percentage of served locations by county.



**Mobile connectivity is also an issue in rural areas of the state.** Although the BEAD grant and other broadband deployment funding programs are focused on fixed broadband deployment, mobile connectivity is also an issue in the state, especially in rural areas. The table below shows the percentage of area with mobile coverage according to the FCC broadband map using December 2022 data. The map likely overstates coverage but does show that some areas of the state lack 4G coverage and many areas lack 5G coverage. To get better coverage, some rural residents purchase phones and plans from two different providers.

<b>Percentage of Area with Mobile Coverage</b>				
FCC Broadband Map December 2022				
	<b>3G</b> <i>(0.2/0.05 Mbps)</i>	<b>4G</b> <i>(5/1 Mbps)</i>	<b>5G-NR</b> <i>(7/1 Mbps)</i>	<b>5G-NR</b> <i>(35/3 Mbps)</i>
Nebraska	69.46%	91.45%	21.03%	9.28%
United States	12.6%	66.22%	44.31%	24.5%

**Broadband Availability for Agriculture.** Broadband is important for agriculture. Farmers and ranchers need upload speeds of 50-100+ Mbps to transfer the immense amount of data generated to the cloud. In the future even greater upload speeds may be required.

Different methods of connectivity are required for agriculture, including:

- Low-bandwidth connectivity for devices like sensors or monitors often called Internet of Things (IoT) devices.
- High speed, centralized broadband with symmetrical gigabit connectivity for targeted agricultural operational headquarters such as a farm or ranch operations center
- High-speed decentralized coverage over large agricultural areas. The FCC Precision Agriculture Task Force recommends wireless symmetrical connectivity of 100 Mbps over farms and ranches. While some connectivity may be available through public networks, private networks may need to be deployed to ensure complete coverage over farms and ranches.

### 3.2.1 Covered Populations Needs Assessment [Requirement 1]

Needs	Barriers
<b>Broadband Availability-Fixed</b>	<p><b>Barrier: Lack of Business Case.</b> Fixed broadband is unavailable in some rural areas of the state due to a lack of business case to deploy broadband. Small, rural carriers are often more willing to look at a return on investment over a longer period.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas, including areas outside city limits of larger cities and Native Americans living in tribal areas</p>
<b>Broadband Availability-Mobile</b>	<p><b>Barrier: Lack of Business Case.</b> Mobile broadband is unavailable in some rural areas of the state due to a lack of business case to build out in some rural areas.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Those living in rural areas and Native Americans living in tribal areas</p> <p><b>Barrier: Limited Grant Funding/Support for Mobile Buildout.</b> BEAD, Capital Projects, and Nebraska Broadband Bridge funding is focused on</p>

	<p>fixed broadband deployment. The FCC has established the 5G Fund for Rural America, but it is still in the rule-making phase. The NPSC funds some mobile tower build-outs, but the amount available is not large.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and Native Americans living in tribal areas</p>
<p><b>Broadband Availability for Agriculture</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Limited Grant Funding/Support for Wireless Broadband over Farms and Ranches.</b> BEAD, Capital Projects, and Nebraska Broadband Bridge funding is focused on fixed broadband deployment. The FCC has established the 5G Fund for Rural America, but it is still in the rule making process. The NPSC funds some mobile tower buildouts, but the amount of the fund is not large. Getting coverage over farms and ranches may require building private wireless networks.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and Native Americans living in tribal areas</p>
<p><b>Broadband Access in Public Places</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Availability of Broadband at Rural Libraries, Senior Centers, and Other Facilities.</b> Some libraries and senior centers lack broadband.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 35% of Nebraska libraries serving communities with populations of less than 2,500 have internet access below 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up.</li> <li>▪ Approximately one-third of multi-purpose senior centers do not provide Wi-Fi for public access.</li> </ul> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas</p> <p><b>Barrier: Availability of and Distance to Libraries, Senior Centers, and Other Facilities.</b> Some small communities in Nebraska do not have a library, senior center, or community center. One-third of the Central Nebraska Economic Development District’s 61 communities do not have a library or community center. Members of covered populations in larger communities may still face barriers to going to libraries, senior centers, and other facilities due to mobility issues, lack of transportation, or working during the hours these facilities are open.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and all other covered populations</p>
<p><b>Needs</b></p>	<p><b>Barriers</b></p>
<p><b>Broadband Affordability</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Mobile and Fixed Broadband is Expensive.</b> The affordability of broadband service was one of the top barriers identified in outreach sessions.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People with low incomes are most impacted, but this impacts all covered populations</p> <p><b>Barrier: Higher Costs in Rural Areas.</b> Residents of rural areas often pay more for internet service because there are fewer providers and the technologies available such as satellite or fixed wireless tend to be more expensive than cable or fiber broadband.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas</p> <p><b>Barrier: Affordability is relative.</b> Some rural residents do not see the value of broadband and, therefore, perceive that it is too expensive.</p>

	<p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and older adults</p> <p><b>Barrier: Lack of awareness of ACP and Other Discount Programs.</b> Many low-income and rural residents are not aware of ACP and other programs such as Lifeline.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with low incomes</p> <p><b>Barrier: Distrust of Internet Providers and Government Programs.</b> Some individuals may not trust government programs or internet providers. This may limit ACP participation.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with low incomes, rural residents, members of racial ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers</p> <p><b>Barrier: Stigma of Participating in Government Programs.</b> Some individuals with disabilities and low incomes may feel that there is stigma associated with participating in government programs. This may limit ACP participation.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with low incomes, rural residents, older adults</p>
<p><b>Access to Digital Devices</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Status Quo.</b> Sociodemographic characteristics of rural residents make them less likely to embrace technology, especially computers. For example, older adults in rural Nebraska may not think that they need a smartphone because their friends do not have smartphones (Rural Communities and Digital Device Ownership).</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Rural residents, older adults</p> <p><b>Barrier: Affordability of Devices.</b> Individuals may not be able to afford new devices or to repair older devices.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with low incomes and recently incarcerated individuals but impacts all covered populations</p> <p><b>Barrier: Accessibility of Devices.</b> Some individuals may need additional assistive technology to use digital devices.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with disabilities</p> <p><b>Barrier: Affordability of Assistive Technology.</b> Assistive technology can make digital devices more accessible for individuals with disabilities, but it is often expensive.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with disabilities</p> <p><b>Barrier: Need to Raise Awareness of Opportunities of Assistive and Digital Technologies</b></p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with disabilities</p>

Needs	Barriers
<p><b>Access to Smart Phones</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Mobile Availability.</b> Some areas of the state are not well covered by mobile providers. It is hard to justify buying a smart phone and paying for service if you cannot get service where you live or work.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Residents of rural areas, but impacts all covered populations</p>
<p><b>Access to Devices at Public Places</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Availability of and Distance to Libraries, Senior Centers, and other Facilities.</b> Some small communities in Nebraska lack a library, senior center, or community center. One-third of the Central Nebraska Economic Development District’s 61 communities do not have a library or community center. Members of covered populations in larger communities may still face barriers to going to libraries, senior centers, and other facilities, due to mobility issues, lack of transportation, or working during the hours these facilities are open.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and all other covered populations</p> <p><b>Barrier: Availability of Newer Devices at Libraries, Senior Centers and Other Facilities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Most libraries have devices, but devices may be older especially in small, rural libraries</li> <li>▪ Only 30% of multi-purpose senior centers have devices for seniors to use.</li> </ul> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas</p>
<p><b>Access to Retail Device Locations</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Availability of Retail Locations and Distance to Retail Locations.</b> Rural residents can be an hour or more away from a retail store selling or repairing devices. Members of covered populations in larger communities may still face barriers to going to retail facilities due to mobility issues, lack of transportation, or working during the hours these facilities are open.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and other covered populations</p>
<p><b>Access to Device Repair Services</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Availability of Device Repair Services.</b> Rural residents can be an hour or more away from device repair services. Members of covered populations in larger communities may still face barriers to going to device repair services due to mobility issues, lack of transportation, or working during the hours these facilities are open.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and other covered populations</p>
Needs	Barriers
<p><b>Digital Skills</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: The Current Digital Skill Level of Covered Populations is a Barrier to Achieving Digital Equity</b>  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> The populations with the lowest digital skill levels, according to the Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Veterans</li> <li>▪ People with low incomes</li> <li>▪ Hispanics or Latinos</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adults 65 and older</li> <li>▪ People with disabilities</li> <li>▪ African Americans/Blacks</li> </ul> <p><b>Barrier: Limited Staff Time and Expertise to Provide Training and Assistance at Libraries, Senior Centers, Community Centers, and Other Facilities.</b>  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> People living in rural areas and other covered populations</p> <p><b>Barrier: Individual Barriers and Challenges.</b> For individuals with disabilities, the use of assistive and digital technologies is unique to the individual. Other covered populations may also face individual barriers and challenges.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with disabilities</p> <p><b>Barrier: Lack of Awareness of Resources.</b> At outreach sessions, participants were often unfamiliar with available digital skills classes and opportunities.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> All covered populations</p> <p><b>Barrier: Access to Culturally Appropriate Classes and Assistance.</b> Individuals learn best in an environment in which they are comfortable.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Members of racial ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, individuals with disabilities, recently incarcerated individuals</p> <p><b>Barrier: Individuals and organizations providing services to individuals with disabilities need to better learn to use assistive technology.</b> For example, staff at medical facilities need to learn how to use digital relay equipment.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with disabilities</p> <p><b>Barrier: Need to Know How to Use Technology to Access Online Resources.</b> If individuals lack technology skills, it may be difficult for them to utilize online courses and resources.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Older adults, veterans, people with low incomes, people with language barriers</p> <p><b>Barrier: Requires More than One Touch.</b> Technology skill development is not a one-time event. It requires lifelong learning.  <b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> All covered populations</p>
<p><b>Needs</b></p> <p><b>Knowledge and Use of Privacy and Security Practices</b></p>	<p><b>Barriers</b></p> <p><b>Barrier: Few Places to Learn about Privacy and Security Outside Work.</b> Several participants at outreach sessions commented that they learned their technology skills and privacy and security practices from work. Outside of the workplace, there are not many places to learn about privacy and security. Individuals with jobs that do not include using digital technologies may not receive security training. Employees</p>

	<p>working at small businesses are also less likely to receive security training.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Older adults, veterans, rural residents and other covered populations, recently incarcerated individuals</p> <p><b>Barrier: Requires More than One Touch.</b> Learning privacy and security practices is not a one-time event. It requires lifelong learning.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Older adults, veterans, people with low incomes, people with language barriers</p> <p><b>Barrier: Lack of Mobile Devices and Consistent Phone Number.</b> The use of two-factor authentication is becoming more prevalent. Individuals who do not have a consistent mobile phone number and device may have a difficult time using two-factor authentication.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Low-income individuals, recently incarcerated individuals, veterans, older adults</p>
<p><b>Accessibility of Online Resources</b></p>	<p><b>Barrier: Lack of Awareness.</b> Some rural residents may not be aware of online resources.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Low-income individuals</p> <p><b>Barrier: Difficult Navigation/Processes.</b> Some online resources are not easy to navigate, especially for those with disabilities or language barriers.</p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Low-income individuals</p> <p><b>Barrier: Most Websites and PDFs have accessibility errors.</b></p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with disabilities</p> <p><b>Barrier: Some government websites do not have translations available.</b></p> <p><b>Covered Populations Most Impacted:</b> Individuals with language barriers</p>

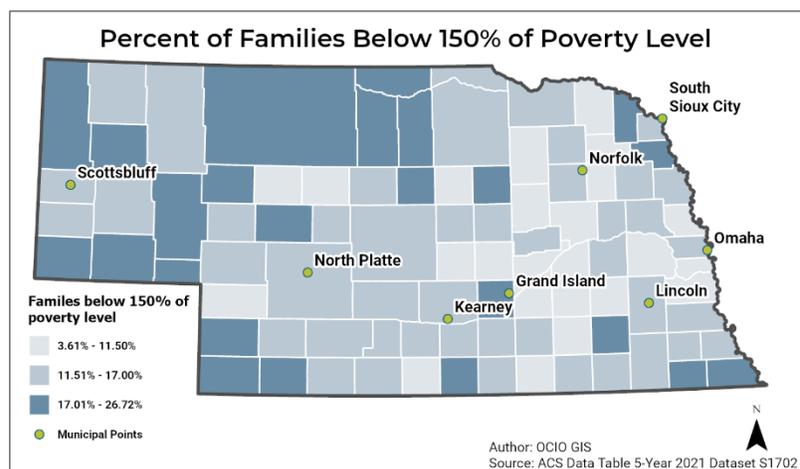
## People with Low Incomes

Members of households at 150% or less of the federal poverty make up 18.1% of Nebraska's population.

### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Fixed broadband availability
- Mobile broadband availability



- Access to device support services
- Availability of and distance to facilities which offer internet access, device access, and training and support
- Need to improve or keep up on digital skills
- Lack of training and support services
- Limited capacity at some libraries, senior centers, community centers, and other facilities due to inadequate broadband, devices, or staff time to provide assistance

## Older Adults

Adults 60 years or older are Nebraska’s second largest covered population, comprising 22.5% of Nebraska’s population.

### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Fixed broadband availability
- Mobile broadband availability
- Access to device support services
- Availability of and distance to facilities which offer internet access, device access, and training and support
- Limited capacity at some libraries, senior centers, community centers, and other facilities due to inadequate broadband, devices, or staff time to provide assistance
- Need to improve or keep up on digital skills
- Lack of training opportunities on privacy and security practices
- Adults 80 years and older may have cognitive, motor, vision or hearing impairments which make it more difficult for them to learn and use digital technologies, including privacy and security practices

## People Who Are Incarcerated

Incarcerated individuals make up 0.5% of Nebraska’s population with an average daily population of 5,516 people in Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) facilities with an additional 41 housed in contracted county jails in FY2022.

People who are currently incarcerated have limited access to the internet because of security concerns. Inmates do have access to a tablet while they are incarcerated.

NDCS is starting to give more access to employment websites and housing websites in Lincoln Community Corrections Centers with staff to oversee individuals.

NDCS has awarded vocational and life skills grants to organizations that work with incarcerated people to improve their jobs skills and to help them reenter society. Inmates have access to the internet at those organizations. Several of these organizations purchase prepaid phones for inmates to have and use upon their release. Several of the vocational and life skills programs offer training and assistance in using smartphones and computers.

### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Need to improve digital skills
- Access to device support services
- Availability of and distance to facilities which offer internet access, device access, and training and support
- Limited capacity at some libraries, senior centers, community centers, and other facilities due to inadequate broadband, devices, or staff time to provide assistance

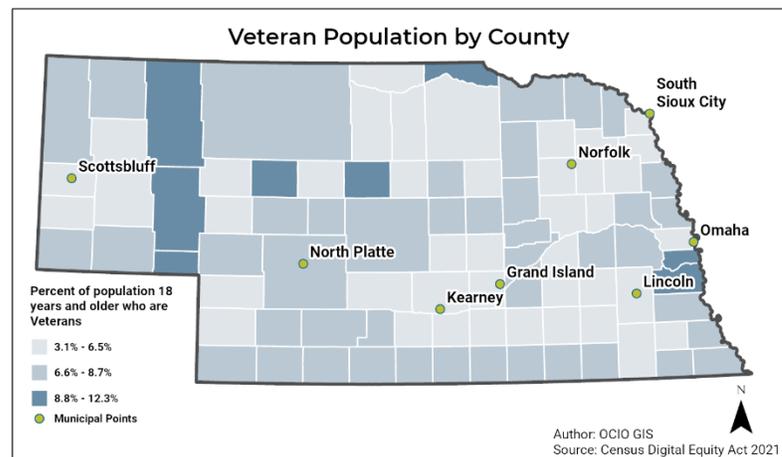
## Veterans

Veterans make up 5.8% of Nebraska’s population. Twenty-six percent of Nebraska veterans are age 75 and over versus 9.3% of Nebraska’s population. Nebraska veterans are less likely to be living in poverty (6.3% versus 10.5% of Nebraskans) and nearly twice as likely to be disabled (29.6% versus 15% of Nebraskans).

### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Fixed broadband availability
- Mobile broadband availability
- Access to device support services
- Availability of and distance to facilities which offer internet access, device access, and training and support
- Limited capacity at some libraries, senior centers, community centers, and other facilities due to inadequate broadband, devices, or staff time to provide assistance
- Need to improve or keep up on digital skills
- Lack of training opportunities on privacy and security practices
- Adults 80 years and older may have cognitive, motor, vision, or hearing impairments which make it more difficult for them to learn and use digital technologies including privacy and security practices
- Veterans with disabilities may have individual barriers and challenges, making the use of assistive and digital technologies unique to the individual



## People with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities make up 12.6% of Nebraska’s population or an estimated 226,316 people. Mobility disabilities are the most prevalent (5.3%), followed by cognitive disabilities (4.2%), hearing disabilities (3.8%), independent living disabilities (3.5%), vision disabilities (2.0%), and self-care disabilities (1.8%) (2017-2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates from ADA-PARC). People may have more than one disability and vary in the severity of their disabilities. Although members of all covered populations are different, people with disabilities have a greater range of abilities and needs.

White Nebraskans have a higher prevalence of disabilities (10.2%). Over 85% of people with disabilities in Nebraska are White. As adults age, they are more likely to have a disability. Nearly one-third (32.4%) of Nebraskans 65 and older have a disability. Nebraskans with disabilities are more likely to live below the poverty line (22.9% versus 8.8%). They also have lower median incomes (\$26,147 versus \$38,539) (2017-2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates from ADA-PARC).

In addition to the 12.6% of Nebraskans with a disability, there are likely many other Nebraskans who may benefit from accessibility accommodations. Over 50% of Nebraskans reported having difficulties seeing, hearing, walking, remembering or concentrating, taking care of themselves, or communicating (Nebraska Digital Access and Skills survey).

### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Fixed broadband availability
- Mobile broadband availability
- Individual barriers and challenges: the use of assistive and digital technologies is unique to the individual
- Need to raise awareness of opportunities of assistive and digital technologies
- Individuals and organizations providing services to individuals with disabilities need to better learn to use assistive technology
- Access to device support services
- Many websites and PDFs have accessibility errors

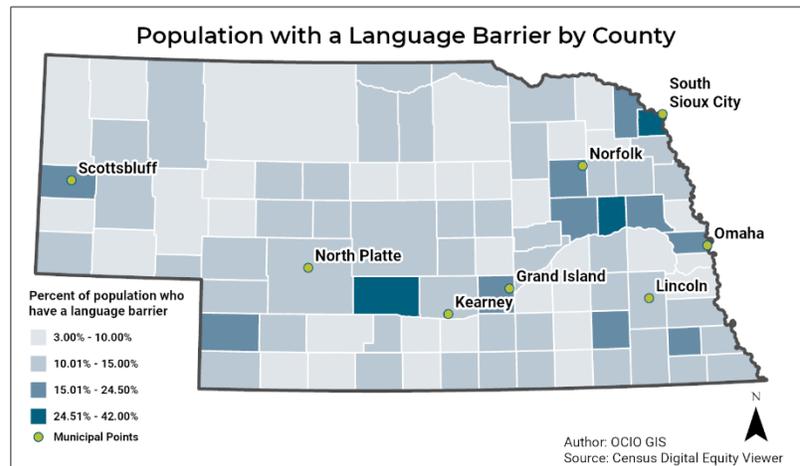
## People with Language Barriers

Individuals with language barriers make up 14.5% of Nebraskans and include those with low literacy levels and English language learners.

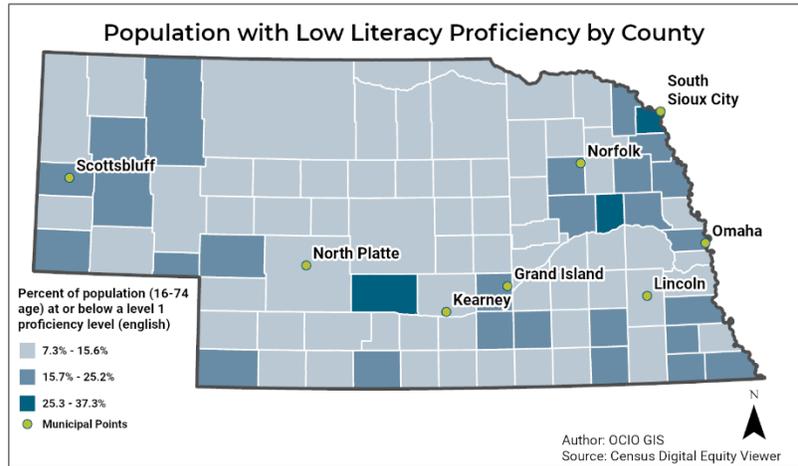
### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Fixed broadband availability
- Mobile broadband availability
- Access to device support services
- Availability of and distance to facilities which offer internet access, device access, and training and support



- Need to improve or keep up on digital skills
- Lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate training and support services
- Limited capacity at some libraries, senior centers, community centers, and other facilities due to inadequate broadband, devices, or staff time to provide assistance



## Racial Ethnic Minorities and Native Americans

Racial ethnic minorities make up 21.6% of Nebraska’s population and are Nebraska’s third largest covered population.

### Individuals and Percent Population Below Poverty Line by Race and Ethnicity - Nebraska

ACS 2022 1 Year Estimate Table S1701

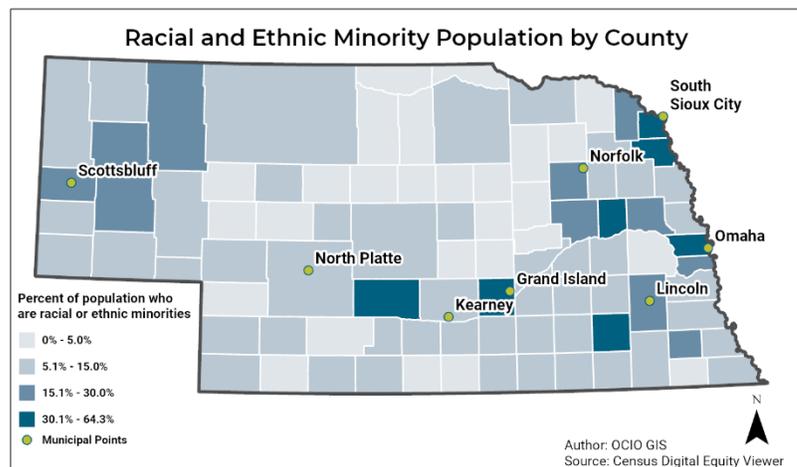
<b>RACE AND ETHNICITY</b>	<b>Individuals Below Poverty Line</b>	<b>Percent Below Poverty Line</b>
Black or African American alone	25,148	28.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	3,877	20.8%
Asian alone	4,974	10.2%
Some other race alone	12,974	15.4%
Two or more races	25,893	15.1%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	37,749	16.0%

Members of racial ethnic minorities are more likely to live below the poverty line, with 28.7% of Black or African Americans, 20.8% of American Indians and Alaskan Natives, and 16% of Hispanics living in poverty in Nebraska.

### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Fixed broadband availability
- Mobile broadband availability
- Availability of and distance to facilities which offer internet access, device access, and training and support
- Need to improve or keep up on



digital skills

- Lack of culturally appropriate training and support services
- Limited capacity at some libraries, senior centers, community centers, and other facilities due to inadequate broadband, devices, or staff time to provide assistance

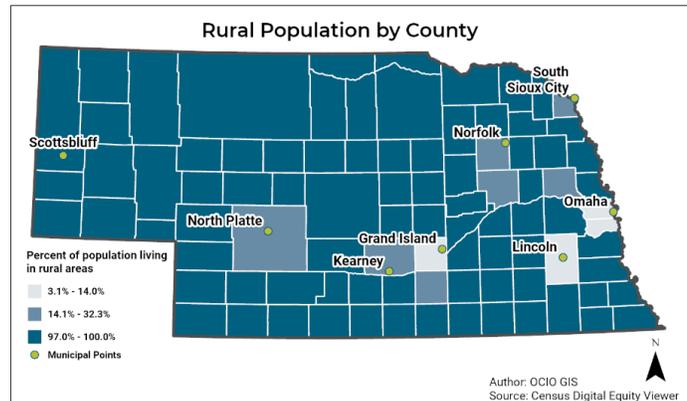
## Rural residents

Rural residents are Nebraska’s largest covered population, making up 36.2% of Nebraska’s population.

### Key Barriers and Needs

Key barriers and needs include:

- Fixed broadband availability
- Mobile broadband availability
- Wireless broadband availability for agriculture
- Broadband affordability
- Affordability of devices
- Access to device repair services
- Availability of and distance to facilities which offer internet access, device access, and training and support
- Need to improve or keep up on digital skills
- Limited capacity at some rural libraries, senior centers, community centers, and other facilities due to inadequate broadband, devices, or staff time to provide assistance

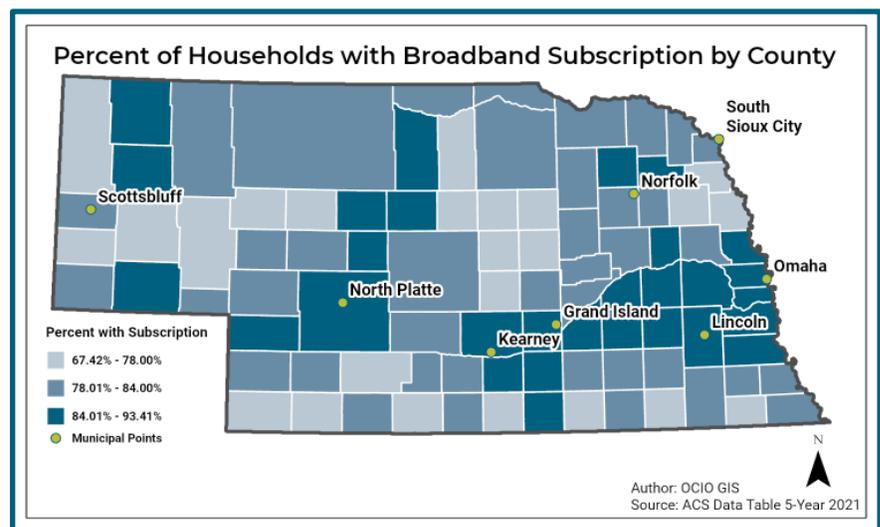


### 3.2.2 Broadband Adoption

**91% of Nebraskans have internet access at home. Covered populations have lower broadband subscription rates.** Older adults, those with less than a high school education, those with low incomes, and those who do not speak English well are the demographic groups least likely to have internet access at home.

**Broadband subscription rates vary by county.** The map to the right shows the percent of households with a broadband subscription by county.

**To be fully connected in today’s digital economy and society, most individuals need two kinds of connectivity: mobile and fixed connectivity.** Nearly one-third of Nebraskans have no internet connectivity or only one kind of connectivity.



**Rural areas and low-income urban areas with high percentages of members of racial ethnic minorities have lower broadband subscription rates.**

**While they have very different demographic makeups, residents of rural areas and residents of qualified census tracts (census tracts in which at least 50% of households have an income less than 60% of the Area Median Gross Income) in North and South Omaha express similar needs for broadband access, including:**

- The ability for businesses to grow in the community
- The need for older adults to access healthcare through telehealth
- The need for broadband for completing homework and accessing online classes
- The desire for their children to have opportunities to stay in their communities

Recognizing that similarities exist between rural areas and low-income urban areas with high percentages of members of racial ethnic minorities and Native Americans may aid in building statewide support for digital equity initiatives.

The qualified census tracts with the lowest rates of broadband access were in South Sioux City in Dakota County, Beatrice in Gage County, and Thurston County which includes the Omaha and Winnebago Reservations.

The qualified census tracts in North and South Omaha and Lincoln have the highest number of households with no internet at home or only one type of connectivity.

Telehealth and precision agriculture are two applications which utilize broadband technologies and are in relatively early stages of adoption. The increased use of these technologies could benefit many Nebraskans.

### **Telehealth**

The use of telehealth exploded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the use of telehealth remains above pre-pandemic levels, its use has decreased since the height of the pandemic.

The 2021 NTIA Internet Use found that 49.2% of Nebraskans access health records online and 45.8% research medical conditions online. Approximately 40% of Nebraskans communicate with a doctor using the internet.

<b>Use of Health-related Internet Activities by Nebraskans</b>	
2021 NTIA Internet Use Survey/CPS Computer and Internet Use Supplement	
Use electronic health monitoring	5.7%
Communicate with a doctor using the internet	40.1%
Access health records online	49.2%
Research health information online	45.8%

The use of telehealth technologies could improve access to care in areas of the state which face shortages of health care professionals. The increased use of telehealth technologies such as remote patient monitoring could also improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities. Barriers include:

- Patients who do not have broadband access in their homes due to availability, affordability or other reasons.
- Patients who lack digital devices or the digital skills necessary to use telehealth

- technologies.
- Staffing at medical clinics and hospitals to manage remote monitoring or other telehealth applications.
- Cost of telehealth technologies.

### **Precision Agriculture**

**Agriculture is a significant part of Nebraska’s economy.** The market value of crops and livestock produced in Nebraska in 2017 was \$21,983,430,000 with 8.4% of Nebraska farms and ranchers producing over \$1 million in crops and livestock. Nebraska ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the total market value of agricultural products sold; 3<sup>rd</sup> in the total market value of grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas; and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the total market value of livestock, poultry, and products (USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture).

Fully adopting next generation precision agriculture technologies in the United States would result in potential annual gross benefits of up to \$13 billion for row crops and \$20.6 billion for livestock and dairy with over a third of these benefits dependent on broadband (USDA *A Case for Rural Broadband*).

**Benefits of precision agriculture extend beyond farms and ranches.** Precision agriculture and connectivity to the last acre is essential for water quality, better resource management of water, food safety, alleviation of labor shortages, reducing the carbon footprint, and reducing food loss at the farm level. Improving connectivity for farms and ranches could also improve connectivity for other services in rural areas, including telehealth and emergency response.

**Nebraska ranks second in the use of precision ag technologies.** In 2023, 55% of Nebraska farmers and ranchers reported using precision ag technologies, up from 51% in 2021 (USDA Technology Use). Internet use and smart phone usage by Nebraska farmers and ranchers is increasing.

- 85% of Nebraska farmers and ranchers own or use a smart phone, up from 80% in 2021
- 90% of Nebraska farms have internet access, up from 85% in 2021
- 77% of Nebraska farmers own or use a desktop or laptop computer, up from 74% in 2021 (USDA Technology Use)

Barriers include:

- The availability of fixed broadband to farm and ranch headquarters and the availability of wireless broadband over farms and ranches
- The digital skills of some farmers and ranchers—especially older farmers and ranchers
- The cost of devices and equipment

Additionally, legal and technical issues; including data ownership and portability, right to repair, and technical standards and interoperability; may impede the full adoption of next generation precision agriculture technologies. Industry efforts to address these issues would likely accelerate the adoption of precision agriculture technologies.

As farmers and ranchers are increasing their reliance upon next generation precision farming applications, the risk of cyberattacks is also increasing. Food processors are also at risk as the 2021 ransomware attack on meatpacker JBS demonstrated. Industry-wide efforts to increase the security of next generation precision farming technologies and the industrial control

systems used in food production will likely be needed to improve the cybersecurity of agriculture and the food industry. Small farms and ranches may be especially vulnerable because they do not employ full-time information technology (IT) professionals and may be less likely to follow cybersecurity best practices.

### 3.2.3 Broadband Affordability

A discount of \$30 per month for low-income households is currently being provided through the FCC’s ACP. Residents of tribal lands and those in high-cost areas can receive \$75 per month in support. Some participating telecommunications providers also offer discounted digital devices. Nearly 89,000 households out of 284,439 eligible households (31%) in Nebraska have enrolled in the program. Nebraska’s enrollment rate is higher than six of our neighboring states but lags the U.S. participation rate of 39%. Funding for ACP is expected to be exhausted in April 2024 unless Congress reappropriates funding for the program.

<b>Percent of Eligible Households Enrolled in Affordable Connectivity Program</b>	
August 2023	
<b>Geography</b>	<b>Percent of Eligible Households Enrolled</b>
Colorado	28%
Iowa	22%
Kansas	28%
Missouri	35%
Nebraska	31%
South Dakota	16%
Wyoming	24%
United States	39%

Source: [Education Superhighway ACP Enrollment Tracker](#)

SEND D received a grant from the FCC to promote the ACP and increase enrollment numbers in Nebraska statewide. SEND D partnered with the other economic development districts to collaborate and effectively reach each part of the state through informed outreach to Nebraska’s distinct communities. SEND D’s outreach includes building partnerships with community-based organizations that provide direct services to qualifying participants, such as nonprofits, school districts, and government agencies, and conducting presentations filled with resources and best ACP outreach practices. Many social service agencies also provide information on the program and assistance in enrolling. Additional outreach efforts, however, could improve Nebraska’s enrollment rate.

***“It makes it difficult to take classes to upskill and improve my ability to increase my salary. There are not enough programs to provide help with Internet access and the requirements to qualify are very invasive. The internet is more important than the US Postal service. I feel we need to treat it like that or even at the level of public education for all!”***

–Nebraska Broadband and Digital Equity Outreach Session participant

### Library Broadband

Libraries are important digital inclusion partners, providing access to the internet and digital devices as well as training and support. While over half of all Nebraska public libraries offer

fiber connections for patrons, 100 libraries currently do not provide fiber connections. The NLC aims to increase the number of libraries with fiber connections, to increase the stability of the connections, range, and stability of Wi-Fi, and solidify the security of the library networks.

The NLC offers free DNS filter access that is centrally managed by NLC staff and CIPA compliant to Nebraska libraries. The NLC is also providing free assessments of network infrastructure to libraries, especially those that are considering installing a fiber connection. In addition, the NLC offers support to libraries by providing some new network equipment (routers, switches, and Wi-Fi mesh equipment), and assistance with network configurations.

Libraries can apply for E-Rate support for internet access, telecommunications services, and related equipment. To-date, only 69 Nebraska libraries have accessed for E-rate, largely due to reported high burden and small reward for libraries. While the NLC has always

offered training and assistance to libraries applying for E-Rate, alleviating some of the additional barriers (e.g., CIPA compliance/DNSFilter, network equipment, IT assessments,-maintenance, and support) may increase participation in the program.

Additionally, the NLC is encouraging the 100 libraries without fiber connections to utilize E-Rate Special Construction funding, which includes matching funds to provide fiber at zero cost to the library. The NLC has also collaborated with NROC to inform and encourage community leaders and local government officials to utilize the Special Construction model to bring fiber to libraries that lack it. This offers communities opportunities to expand fiber connectivity to local businesses and residences. The NLC produced two short videos for libraries and community leaders to watch in anticipation of filing for special construction in E-Rate FY2024-25 and beyond:

- [Now IS the Time \(for library directors\),](#)
- [Sometimes it takes a village to bring fiber to the local public library](#)

NLC recognizes that libraries are providing robust access to technology, but partnerships with community organizations, groups, and volunteers are lacking. NLC seeks to encourage more programs and services to offer and promote digital equity partnerships to increase digital equity learning opportunities in Nebraska communities.



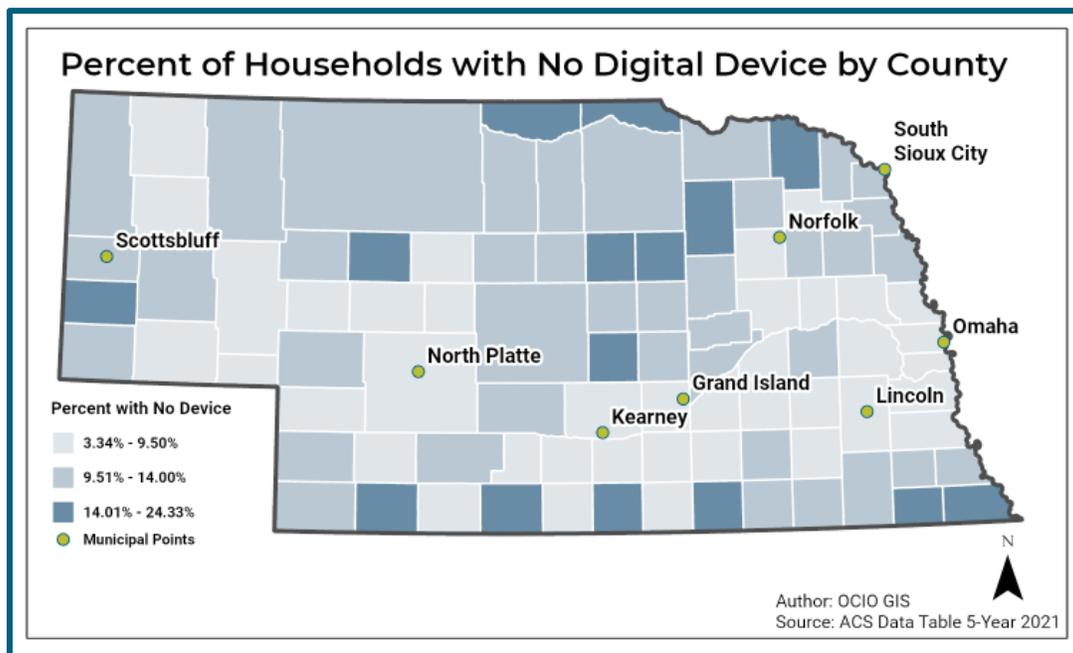
Jennifer Einspahr, director of the Arapahoe Public Library, stands by the circulation desk decorated to kick off the summer reading program.

## Digital Devices

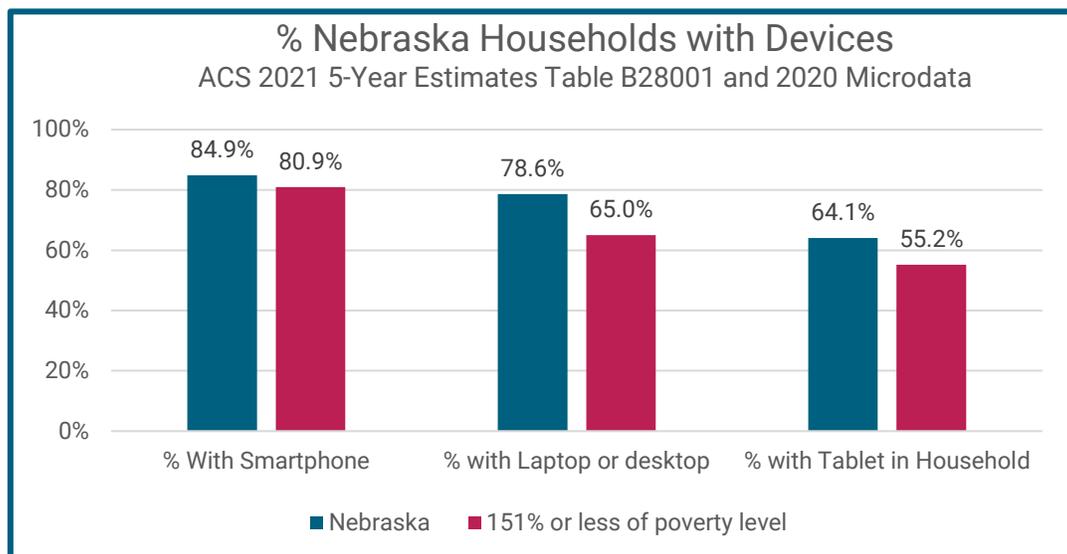
**Approximately 7.2% of Nebraska households have no digital devices.** As shown in the map to the right, some rural counties have much higher rates of households with no digital devices.

**To be fully connected, most individuals need a mobile and large screen device.** Approximately 20% of Nebraska households have no digital devices or only one digital device.

**Residents of rural areas and qualified census tracts have lower rates of device access.** Approximately 26.4% of rural Nebraska residents have either no device or one type of device versus 16.8% of urban residents.



Residents of qualified census tracts in South Sioux City in Dakota County, Beatrice in Gage County, and Scottsbluff in Scotts Bluff County have the lowest rates of device access.



Most Nebraskans as well as most members of covered populations are more likely to have a smartphone than a desktop or laptop computer. Older adults and veterans are more likely to have a desktop or laptop than a smartphone.

### Digital Skills

Most Nebraskans are very confident or somewhat confident in their ability to complete tasks using the internet. Respondents to the Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey were asked to indicate how confident they were at completing 11 internet tasks. Fifty percent or more of the respondents were very confident that they could complete six tasks:

- Searching for and applying for jobs
- Accessing online banking or financial services
- Using a word processing application
- Using e-mail
- Using social media
- Online shopping

Members of many covered populations were generally less confident in their ability to complete tasks.

### Privacy and Security

Fewer Nebraskans are very confident in their ability to use privacy and security practices. Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey respondents were asked to indicate how confident they were at using four privacy and security practices:

- Using strong passwords
- Using a password manager
- Identifying phishing attempts
- Configuring privacy and security settings in apps and software

Respondents were most confident in using strong passwords, with 47% feeling very confident. Most covered populations were less confident in their ability to complete privacy and security practices. Veterans were the least confident in their ability to use strong passwords. Older adults were the least confident in their ability to use a password manager and to configure privacy and security settings. Rural residents were the least confident in their ability to identify phishing attempts.

### Accessibility of Public Online Resources

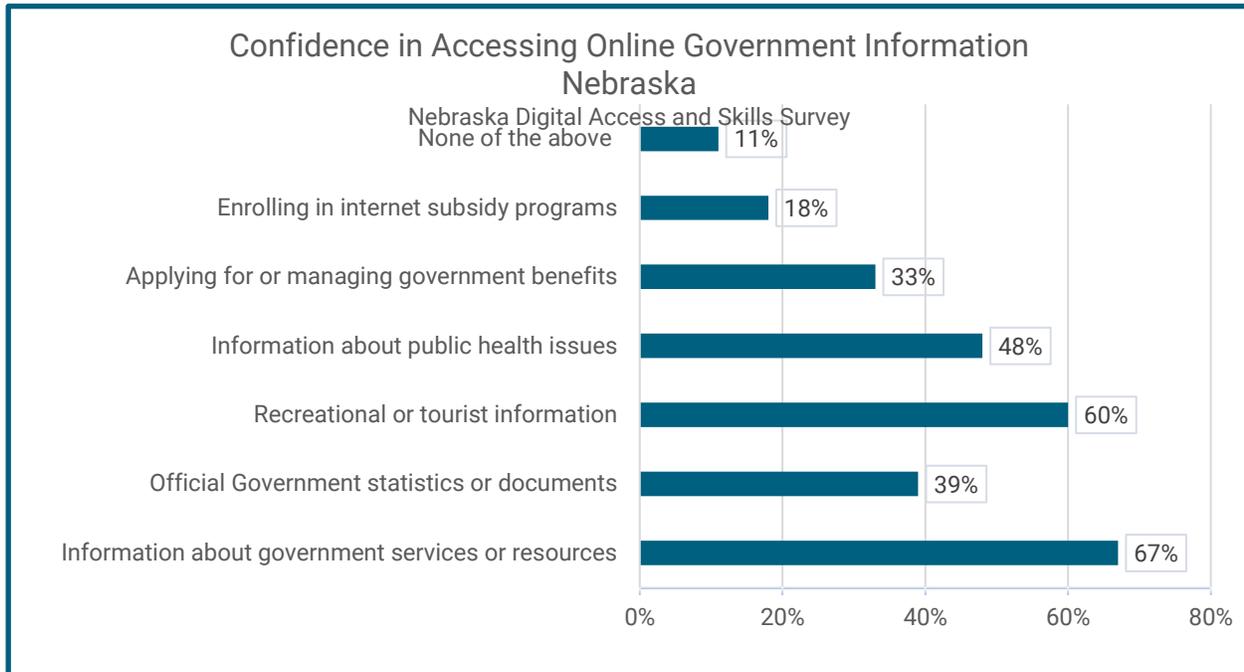
Approximately two-thirds of Nebraska Digital Access and Skills survey respondents indicated that they were confident in their ability to search for information about government services or resources.

Most covered populations reported less confidence in accessing online government information. People with less than a high school diploma were the least confident.

### Smartphone and Computer Software Accessibility

Devices, apps, and software programs are improving digital accessibility. Both Android and Apple phones have several accessibility options. Additional accessibility apps are also available, including apps that convert audio to text or text to audio. Video meeting programs such as Zoom now provide captioning. YouTube videos are also captioned. Commonly used programs such as Word, PowerPoint, and Adobe Acrobat have tools to test for accessibility and make documents more accessible. Many people may not be aware of these features, however.

Affordability of monthly broadband costs is a major barrier to increased broadband adoption in Nebraska. Just over one-half of the respondents to the Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey said they paid between \$40 and \$80 per month for their internet service, excluding the costs of any other services in their bundle. Thirteen percent paid \$100 or more. Many respondents (41%) reported that it is very or somewhat difficult to fit their monthly internet bill into their household’s budget.



**Need to Increase ACP Enrollment.** ACP is a key component of Nebraska’s strategy for addressing broadband affordability. Nebraska’s enrollment rate of 31% was below the U.S. rate of 39% as of August 2023. Barriers to increasing ACP enrollment include:

- Lack of awareness of the program
- Distrust of internet providers and government programs
- Difficulty or perceived difficulty of enrolling
- Perceived stigma of participating in assistance programs

Building social capital and working with trusted community partners can help address these barriers.

**Need for Continued Funding of ACP.** Funding for ACP is expected to be exhausted in April 2024 unless Congress reappropriates funding for the program.

**Need for Greater Broadband Deployment.** Broadband deployment funded through BEAD and other programs will bring additional internet options to many areas that may be more affordable than satellite or unlicensed fixed wireless internet services. Additionally, several fiber providers are overbuilding in many Nebraska communities including the Omaha area. The additional competition may result in lower rates in some communities.

**Need for Affordable Broadband Plans for Low-income Consumers.** NBO is aware of the need for affordable broadband service in the state. According to data collected by NPSC as part of

the Capital Projects Fund and Nebraska Broadband Bridge Plan, the average cost of affordable plans has decreased over the past two years. However, the cost of broadband remains high for some, especially if they reside in a rural part of the state or only have one or two providers to choose from. To assess affordability for Nebraskans, data was collected by manually reviewing provider websites, analyzing data from NPSC, and reviewing the FCC Urban Rate Survey data from 2021, 2022, and 2023.

NBO will require that all BEAD applicants offer plans to eligible households that provide typical speeds of at least 100 Mbps downstream, at least 20 Mbps upstream, and latency measurements of no more than 100 milliseconds. Eligibility for these plans will be tied to enrollment in ACP or successor programs.

The annual rate for the low-cost affordable plan offered by providers must be 1% of 200% of the total 4-member household income of the Federal Poverty Guidelines in 2023, inclusive of all taxes, fees, and charges. This equates to \$600 a year or \$50 a month. In addition, providers will be required to allow subscribers to apply the ACP Benefit, or any State or Federal successor plan, toward the low-cost plan. The proposed low-cost plan may not be subject to data caps, surcharges, usage-based throttling, service installation fees, activation fees, equipment purchase fees, or any other recurring or non-recurring fees that add to a customer rate. Also, if, after the establishment of its low-cost plan, the provider offers another low-cost plan with higher speeds, the provider will be required to permit its existing low-cost subscribers to upgrade to the new low-cost plan at no additional cost. NBO will require submission of a low-cost plan and score the proposed affordable plan as defined in Section 2.4.2. All providers are encouraged to place links to information about the ACP in conspicuous locations on their websites.

All BEAD subgrantees will be required to participate in ACP or any successor program.

**Middle Class Affordability Plans.** To effectively establish a middle-class affordability plan, NBO must consider the current economic landscape in the State of Nebraska. According to the most recent American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau the median household income in Nebraska in 2023 is \$66,644. NBO reviewed existing price plans for 100 Mbps offerings on Nebraska provider websites as well as data from the FCC Urban Rate Survey from 2021, 2022, and 2023. Based on this market analysis, NBO is documenting the current median rate at 2% of the median household income in Nebraska in 2023 for a 100 Mbps symmetrical service plan.

This equates to \$1,332.88 a year or \$111.07 a month. NBO encourages broadband providers to continue to strive to offer priority broadband service in this area of pricing. As explained further in Section 2.4.2, this type of plan will be scored as part of the application process. The proposed plan must also provide a latency of less than 100 milliseconds. The plan must not be subject to data caps, surcharges, or usage-based throttling and must be subject to the same acceptable use policies as all other subscribers to broadband services offered by the provider. NBO will require all providers to offer the middle-class plan across the BEAD funded network but encourages providers to offer the plan to all customers. NBO understands the difference between business and residential plans for providers, and as a result the middle-class affordability plan is intended for residential customers. All providers should promote the availability of both the low-cost and middle-class affordability plans on their websites and through other promotional avenues.



Members of the Central Nebraska Economic Development District digital equity committee with Congressman Adrian Smith in O'Neill. Congressman Smith spoke after the Broadband and Digital Equity listening session.

**Need to Improve the Capacity of Libraries, Senior Centers, and Other Organizations.** These organizations are key community partners in providing internet and computer access to students and the public as well as assistance with technology. However, some of these facilities do not currently offer high-speed broadband connectivity to the public:

- 35% of Nebraska libraries do not have fiber connectivity.
- Approximately one-third of Nebraska senior centers do not provide Wi-Fi for public use.

Limited staff time, inadequate broadband service, outdated networking, and lack of access to technical support are barriers that limit the ability of small libraries, senior centers, and community centers to participate in digital inclusion activities.

## 4 Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

### 4.1 Coordination and Outreach Strategy [Requirement 4]

Sixty-five representatives of regional digital equity committees and key stakeholders attended the State Digital Equity Workshop on August 8, 2023, in Kearney.

Nebraska's coordination and outreach strategy includes the following components:

- The development of regional plans by the state's economic development districts
- 14 webinars featuring 27 speakers
- 26 outreach sessions across Nebraska engaging 309 participants
- 4 Tribal consultations
- State Planning Workshop with 65 representatives of regional digital opportunities committees and key stakeholders
- 4 focus groups of 60 members of covered populations conducted by the UNO Center for Public Affairs Research and the Department of Gerontology
- The Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey of over 1,500 Nebraskans conducted by the University of Nebraska
- Meetings with key stakeholders
- Coordination with BEAD Program
- 30-day comment period on the draft digital equity plan, including at least three public comment sessions



### Development of Regional Plans

The Digital Equity program contracted with the state's economic development districts to develop regional digital equity plans. Economic development districts recruited representatives of covered populations and key stakeholders to participate in regional committees. The development of regional planning committees helped build a better understanding of digital equity and opportunities among regional stakeholders and community leaders. By building capacity and forging relationships with stakeholders within regions, regional and local entities will be better prepared to implement projects which enable access and use of technology by covered populations. Collectively, the regional digital equity committees collaborated with 463 organizations.

<b>Organizations with which Regional Digital Opportunities Committees Collaborated</b>	
Civil Rights Organizations	3
Community Anchor Institutions	74
County or Municipal Governments	117
Economic Development Organizations	31
Health or Telehealth Organization	10
Hispanic-Serving Institution	1
Indian Tribe, Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian Organization	2
Industry Representative or Association	48
Institutions of Higher Education	9
Local Education Agency	20
Nonprofit Organizations	25
Organizations that Represent Covered Populations	74
Other	27
Predominantly Black Institutions	1
Public Housing Authority	3
Workforce Development Organization	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>463</b>

## Outreach Sessions and Tribal Consultations

Twenty-six outreach sessions were held across Nebraska, engaging 309 participants.

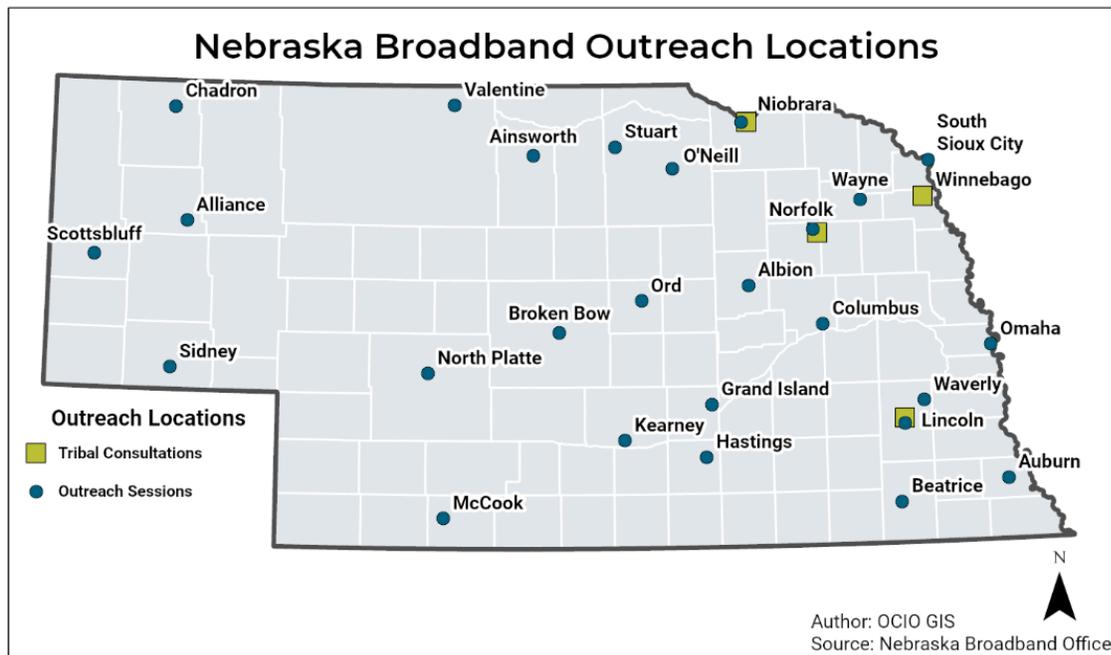
<b>Broadband and Digital Equity Outreach Sessions and Number of Attendees</b>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Attendees</b>
Grand Island, Nebraska Extension Hall County	April 19	17
Niobrara, Niobrara Village Fire Hall	April 26	12
Norfolk, Norfolk Public Library	April 26	9
Valentine, Mid Plains Community College	May 1	9
Ainsworth, the Connection	May 2	12
Stuart, Stuart Auditorium	May 2	11
O'Neill, Evergreen Assisted Living	May 3	28
Columbus, Central Community College	May 3	4
Sidney, Cheyenne County Community Center	May 8	7
Scottsbluff, Guadalupe Center	May 9	13
Chadron, Chadron State College	May 9	13
Alliance, Knight Museum	May 10	6
Ord, Ord Learning Center	May 11	15
Albion, Cornerstone Bank	May 15	13
Auburn, Auburn Council Chambers	May 16	19
Wayne, Community Activity Center	May 17	13
Hastings, Hastings Public Library	May 24	12
Beatrice, Southeast Community College	May 30	10
Waverly, Waverly Community Foundation Community Center	May 31	9
Kearney, Kearney Public Library	June 8	7
North Platte, Harvest Christian Fellowship	June 13	5
McCook, Public Safety Center	June 14	5

Broken Bow, Broken Bow Public Library	June 21	8
South Sioux City, Marriott Riverfront	June 29	12
Lincoln, NDOT Auditorium	July 11	17
Omaha, NDOT State Operations Center	July 12	23
<b>Total Attendees</b>		<b>309</b>

In addition, four Tribal Consultations were held. The dates and locations of the consultations are shown below.

- March 24 Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, Ponca Tribal Transit Facility, Norfolk
- March 31 Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, Tribal Council Chambers, Winnebago
- April 11 Santee Sioux Nation, Tribal Council Headquarters and Museum, Niobrara
- April 21 Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, Atrium 7<sup>th</sup> floor, Lincoln

A map of the outreach sessions and four tribal consultations is shown below.



## Webinars

Fourteen webinars were held, featuring 27 speakers.

Digital Opportunities Webinars	
Libraries as Digital Equity Partners Wednesday, January 18 11:00 a.m. CT	Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Holly Woldt, NLC</li> <li>▪ Sam Shaw, NLC</li> <li>▪ Denise Harders, Central Plains Library System</li> <li>▪ Amanda Sweet, NLC</li> </ul>
Digital Equity Needs of Older Adults & Resources Wednesday, January 25 11:00 a.m. CT	Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jina Ragland, AARP Nebraska</li> <li>▪ Cynthia Brammeier, Nebraska DHHS SUA</li> <li>▪ Carla Frase, Blue Rivers Area Agency on Aging</li> </ul>

<p>Digital Equity Benchmark Data and Precision Ag          Wednesday, February 1          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Don Linqvist, Linqvist Technologies</li> <li>▪ Anne Byers, NITC/OCIO</li> </ul>
<p>Access to Digital Devices          Wednesday, February 15          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Brian Whitacre, Oklahoma State University</li> <li>▪ Beverly Lahlum Taylor, Digital Express, Metropolitan Community College</li> </ul>
<p>Broadband Availability, Funding &amp; Mapping          Wednesday, February 22          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speaker:          Cullen Robbins, NPSC</p>
<p>Makerspaces and Digital Equity Organizations          Wednesday, March 8          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Michael Sauers, Do Space</li> <li>▪ David Martin, Nebraska Innovation Studio</li> <li>▪ Kristine Flyinghawk, Center for Rural Affairs</li> </ul>
<p>STEM and Technology Workforce Development          Wednesday, March 15          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shonna Dorsey, Nebraska Tech Collaborative</li> <li>▪ Alan Wang, Prairie STEM</li> <li>▪ Kandace Miller, AIM Institute</li> </ul>
<p>Affordable Connectivity Program          Wednesday, March 22          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Anthony Butler, FCC</li> <li>▪ Jenny Miller, Education SuperHighway</li> </ul>
<p>Individuals with Disabilities—Common Vision Conditions          Wednesday, July 12          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speaker:          Molly Wuebker, OTD, OTR/L, Professional Affiliate AIA – Iowa, Iowa ADA Liaison   Great Plains ADA Center</p>
<p>State Disability Organizations and Resources          Thursday, July 13          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bradley A. Meurrens, Disability Rights Nebraska</li> <li>▪ Michael J. Elsken, Disability Rights Nebraska</li> <li>▪ Arlene Garcia Gunderson, NCDHH</li> <li>▪ Carlos Servan, NCBVI</li> <li>▪ Tobias Orr, Assistive Technology Partnership</li> </ul>
<p>Individuals with Disabilities—Digital Accessibility Practices for Hearing          Wednesday, July 19          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speaker:          Molly Wuebker, OTD, OTR/L, Professional Affiliate AIA - Iowa          Iowa ADA Liaison   Great Plains ADA Center</p>
<p>Individuals with Disabilities—Digital Accessibility Practices for Motor          Wednesday, July 20          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speaker:          Molly Wuebker, OTD, OTR/L, Professional Affiliate AIA - Iowa          Iowa ADA Liaison   Great Plains ADA Center</p>
<p>Individuals with Disabilities—General Digital Accessibility          Thursday, July 27          11:00 a.m. CT</p>	<p>Speaker:          Molly Wuebker, OTD, OTR/L, Professional Affiliate AIA - Iowa          Iowa ADA Liaison   Great Plains ADA Center</p>



Patrick Redmond, Deputy Broadband Director, Nebraska Broadband Office gives an update on the BEAD program to participants at the South Sioux City outreach session on May 31, 2024. Photo by Anne Byers.

## State Planning Workshop

Sixty-five representatives of regional digital opportunities committees and key stakeholders attended the State Digital Equity Workshop on August 8, 2023, in Kearney. NBO Director Patrick Haggerty welcomed participants and gave an update on BEAD and NBO. A panel of representatives from digital planning committees shared information from regional plans. Small group discussions focused on addressing broadband subscription and affordability, digital skills, digital devices, privacy and security, and accessibility of online resources. A second round of small group discussions focused on the needs of covered populations.

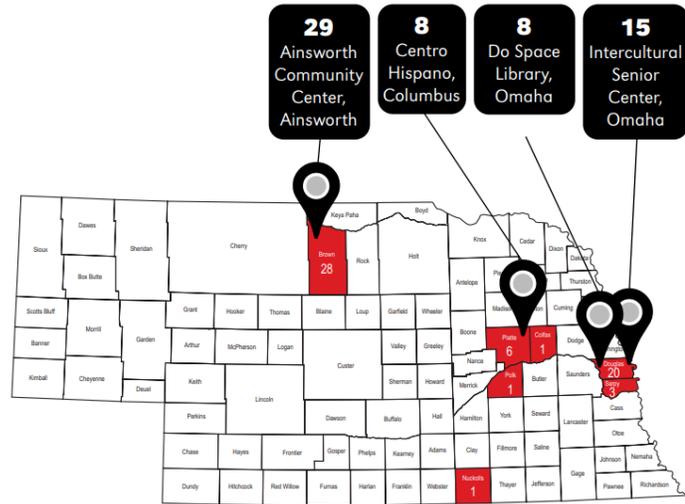


Vicki Quaites-Ferris shares information at the State Digital Equity Planning Workshop.

## Focus Groups

The UNO Center for Public Affairs Research and the Department of Gerontology conducted four focus groups with covered populations. A total of 60 individuals participated in the focus groups which were held at the Ainsworth Community Center in Ainsworth, Centro Hispano in Columbus, Do Space in Omaha, and the Intercultural Senior Center in Omaha. The map to the right from the [focus group report](#) shows the locations and number of participants.

Number of Participants at each Focus Group Location and Counties of Residence



## Digital Access and Skills Survey

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln surveyed over 1,500 Nebraskans about their digital access and skills, providing valuable benchmark data for the state.

## Library Outreach and Engagement

NLC has engaged libraries throughout the planning process. Data from the Public Library Survey was used to provide information for the state asset map. A supplemental survey of libraries on their digital opportunities programming and needs provided additional information and helped NLC staff to develop strategies to better meet the needs of libraries. Staff traveled to regional library system meetings to give updates on the grant and to meet with library directors. Staff have also reached out to all libraries without fiber connections to encourage them to utilize the E-Rate Special Construction Matching Program.

## Organizations with which the Nebraska Digital Equity Team Collaborated [Requirement 5]

The Nebraska Digital Equity planning team collaborated with over 700 organizations. The following table lists the number of organizations by type. A complete list is included in the Appendices.



Maria Downer, director of the Butler Memorial Library in Cambridge, shows a project made in the library's makerspace. Photo by Anne Byers.

<b>Organizations with which Nebraska Digital Equity Team Collaborated</b>	
Civil Rights Organizations	4
Community Anchor Institutions	335
County or Municipal Governments	116
Economic Development Organization	27
Foundation	1
Health or Telehealth Organization	16
Hispanic-Serving Institution	1
Indian Tribe, Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian Organization	6
Industry Representative or Association	45
Institutions of Higher Education	15
Local Education Agency	20
Nonprofit Organizations	33
Organizations that Represent Covered Populations	61
Other	52
Predominantly Black Institutions	1
Public Housing Authority	4
Workforce Development Organization	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>738</b>

## Coordination and Outreach Strategy for Public Comment and Ongoing Engagement [Requirement 9]

NBO worked with Digital Equity staff to organize public comment sessions. Six in-person and virtual public comment sessions were scheduled for the public and other groups.

### **Public-Virtual**

Tuesday, December 5, 2023  
10:00 AM CT to 11:00 AM CT

### **NITC eHealth Council**

Thursday, Dec. 7, 2023  
9:30 AM CT-11:00 AM CT

### **Public-Virtual**

Tuesday, December 5, 2023  
2:00 PM CT to 3:00 PM CT

### **Public-In Person**

Tuesday, December 12, 2023  
11:00 AM CT- noon CT  
Nebraska Department of Transportation,  
1500 Nebraska Parkway, Lincoln, NE

### **NITC Community Council**

Wednesday, Dec. 6, 2023  
8:30 AM CT-10:00 AM CT

### **NROC/Economic Development Districts-Virtual**

Thursday, December 14  
11:00 AM CT-noon CT

To facilitate the public-comment process, digital equity staff developed an online comment form. Information on the plan, public comment form, and comment sessions was also sent out in a press release and via e-mail to participants in the State Digital Equity Planning Workshop, the state’s economic development districts, and other stakeholders.

Additional information about ongoing collaboration efforts is included in the Requirement 4 section.

## Outreach and Coordination During Implementation

### [Requirement 13]

**Continued Engagement with Current Partners and Stakeholders.** The digital equity team will continue to engage with current partners, representatives of covered populations, and other stakeholders through e-mail updates, webinars, and updates on NBO's website.

As noted above, NBO took over responsibility for Nebraska's digital equity work in January of 2024. Incoming staff have expertise in working with racial ethnic minorities, Native American Tribes, people with language barriers, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes, among others. Their experience includes outreach to diverse populations, communicating with and among various audiences, collection and analysis of data, creation and maintenance of coalitions and workgroups, public health practices and programming; program and project administration, implementation, and evaluation; and federal grants management. Staff are also connected to potential partners across the state, including local health departments, nonprofits, government entities, and racial ethnic minority communities. This expertise and experience plus these connections will facilitate delivery of digital equity efforts and help ensure progress toward goals and intended outcomes.

**Establish Programs and Subgrant Opportunities.** Creating programs and subgrant opportunities will contribute to the development of new partnerships and resources. NBO staff with federal grants management experience are adept with ensuring subgrant processes are delivered in ways that help to build and maintain solid relationships, focusing on collaboration and communication in addition to compliance with rules and regulations.

**Efforts to Recruit New Collaborators.** NBO will work with a variety of partners across the state, including representatives of covered populations, workforce agencies, institutions of higher learning, community-based organizations. While the digital equity work done to-date has involved substantive numbers of collaborators, new partnerships and stronger relationships are always of interest. Therefore, some of NBO's efforts will focus on development of new partnerships, focusing on areas in which there may be gaps in the existing matrix.

## Coordination of BEAD and Digital Equity Funding

### [Requirement 15]

NBO and NITC staff partnered on digital equity efforts including outreach sessions and tribal consultations across the state. In January 2024, responsibility for Nebraska's digital equity work was transferred to NBO.

Although some smaller, more densely populated states may have BEAD funding remaining after funding broadband deployment to unserved and underserved locations, NBO does not anticipate having BEAD funding available for digital equity projects and is leveraging the Nebraska Digital Equity Plan to address digital equity.

NBO's Initial Proposal Volume 2 clearly states the role of the Nebraska Digital Equity Plan under Goal 2:

***Goal Two: Expand digital inclusion and adoption to achieve affordability, access, and digital literacy.***

*Connecting all Nebraskan households to high-speed internet access requires investment in digital equity. Nebraska's digital equity efforts are focusing on affordable access to service, access to internet-enabled devices, and digital literacy. The Nebraska State Digital Equity Plan will support the digital equity strategies of the Nebraska Strategic Broadband Plan and provide more detail.*

Similarly, the Nebraska Digital Equity Plan is relying on utilization of BEAD funding to address broadband deployment as reflected in Goal 1 of the Nebraska Digital Equity Plan:

**Goal 1:** Increase the proportion of Nebraska households with affordable, quality broadband service.

**Strategy 1.1:** Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.

**Strategy 1.2:** Using outreach, advocacy, and education, increase the number of broadband providers in Nebraska offering affordable plans for low-income and middle-class households.

## 5 Implementation

### 5.1 Implementation Strategy & Key Activities [Requirement 11] & 5.2 Timeline [Requirement 14]

NBO will more fully develop the state’s implementation plan after reviewing the NOFO for the State Digital Equity Capacity grant and determining the implementation budget. NBO will continue to engage with stakeholders including representatives of covered populations and groups working with covered populations to ensure efforts are appropriate to covered populations.

NBO will also apply results-based accountability (RBA) to the program (Clear Impact, 2016). RBA is an evidence-based decision-making process used to help communities move from talk to action. It is data-driven and incorporates program evaluation from the beginning. RBA focuses on three questions:

- How much did you do?
- How well did you do it?
- Is anyone better off?

These questions will be used to guide planning and implementation efforts.

**Goal 1:** Increase the proportion of Nebraska households with access to affordable, quality broadband service.

**Strategy 1.1:** Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.

Barrier(s) addressed:	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance	Digital navigation									
Measurable Objectives	Core Activities					Timeline								
						2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Distribute and monitor BEAD funding to increase the percentage of locations in Nebraska with 100/20 broadband availability (ensure coverage of all unserved and underserved locations).	Create and communicate subgrant requirements													
	Collect and evaluate letters of intent and applications													
	Award subgrants													
	Monitor subgrants to ensure all projects are completed													
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation													

**Strategy 1.2:** Using outreach, advocacy, and education, increase the number of broadband providers in Nebraska offering affordable plans for low-income and middle-class households.

Barrier(s) addressed:	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance	Digital navigation								
Measurable objective	Core activities	Timeline											
		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032			
Work with stakeholders across the state to increase the proportion of customers reporting they can afford broadband service and it is available to them.	Include requirements re: low-cost and middle-class plans in BEAD subgrants												
	Provide education and advocacy to raise awareness of the need for low-income and middle-class broadband plans												
	Continue work with NDCS to ensure controlled internet access to incarcerated people												
	Work with re-entry programs to increase availability of pre-paid mobile phones for people recently released from NDCS facilities												
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation												

**Goal 2:** Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.

**Strategy 2.1:** Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.

Barrier(s) addressed:	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance	Digital navigation								
Measurable objective	Core activities	Timeline											
		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032			
Work with libraries and other stakeholders to increase the number of libraries with fiber broadband connections.	Work with local partners to support libraries in submitting applications for E Rate and E Rate Special Construction Matching funding												
	Provide training and technical assistance to libraries to help ensure												

	compliance with grant requirements												
	Provide assistance implementing and reporting on grant-funded projects												
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation												

**Strategy 2.2:** Increase awareness of accessibility issues with state agency and local government websites.

Barrier(s) addressed:	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance		Digital navigation							
Measurable objective	Core activities	Timeline											
		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032			
Increase proportion of covered populations who report that they are confident about searching for information about government services or resources.	Create educational opportunities and tools for members of covered populations addressing accessing of government services and resources												
	Work with partners across the state to deliver educational opportunities and tools												
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and participants in educational events incorporate into project implementation												
Increase proportion of NDCS facilities that provide access to employment websites to people about to be released.	Work with NDCS to assess and address barriers to access by incarcerated people, especially those about to be released, to employment websites												
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation												

**Goal 3:** Increase the percentage of Nebraska households with applicable internet devices.

**Strategy 3.1:** Address barriers to the development or expansion of programs which refurbish and repair digital devices and/or distribute new devices to members of covered populations.

Barrier(s) addressed:	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance		Digital navigation							
Measurable objective	Core activities			Timeline									

		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Work with partners statewide to increase the percentage of households with one or more digital devices.	Collaborate with IHLs and other stakeholders to create digital device refurbishment and/or repair programs									
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation									
Work with NDCS to maintain accessibility of digital devices for incarcerated people.	Work with NDCS to determine how best NBO can support their plans and policies related to accessibility of digital devices									
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation									

**Goal 4:** Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.

**Strategy 4.1:** Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.

<b>Barrier(s) addressed:</b>	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance	Digital navigation					
<b>Measurable objective</b>	<b>Core activities</b>		<b>Timeline</b>							
			2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Work with stakeholders to increase the number of digital navigators across Nebraska.	Create infrastructure (formal or informal) to support digital navigators across Nebraska.									
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation									

**Strategy 4.2:** Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.

<b>Barrier(s) addressed:</b>	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance	Digital navigation					
<b>Measurable objective</b>	<b>Core activities</b>		<b>Timeline</b>							
			2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Work with stakeholders to increase the number of	Create educational opportunities and tools for									

people who report they are confident or very confident they can complete digital privacy and security skills	members of covered populations regarding online privacy and security											
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation											
Work with stakeholders to increase the number of re-entry programs that include privacy and security training	Create educational opportunities and tools for members of covered populations regarding online privacy and security											
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation											

**Goal 5:** Increase the use of telehealth technologies in Nebraska to increase access to care in underserved areas and to reduce health disparities.

**Strategy 5.1:** Support efforts by Nebraska hospitals, healthcare providers, associations, and other stakeholders to increase the use of telehealth in Nebraska.

Barrier(s) addressed:	Affordability	Devices	Digital skills	Technical assistance	Digital navigation						
	Measurable objective		Core activities		Timeline						
		2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	
Work with partners and stakeholders to increase the proportion of people who report they use the internet for health monitoring, communication with healthcare providers and/or accessing health records or information.	Connect with healthcare providers, hospitals, public health entities, and other stakeholders to assess barriers to and potential solutions for overcoming barriers to telehealth in Nebraska										
	Solicit feedback from stakeholders and incorporate into project implementation										

## Gap Analysis [Requirement 12]

### Broadband Availability and Affordability

Broadband availability and affordability were the two issues most frequently identified by participants in listening sessions across Nebraska. 86.9% of Nebraska locations and 67.8% of rural Nebraska locations had broadband of at least 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps as of August 2023. Funding from the BEAD program and other funding sources will be used to address the need for broadband service in unserved areas. The following goal and strategy address this gap in coordination with BEAD funding:

**Goal 1:** Increase the proportion of Nebraska households with access to affordable, quality broadband service.

**Strategy 1.1:** Utilize funding from BEAD and other sources to ensure that broadband is available at all locations in Nebraska.

Broadband affordability is a significant barrier for broadband subscription. Nearly ten percent (9.9%) of Nebraska households lack a broadband subscription at home (2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates Table B2002). ACP provides a discount of \$30 per month for low-income households. Qualified residents of tribal lands and those in high-cost areas can receive \$75 per month in support. Nearly 89,000 households out of 284,439 eligible households (31%) in Nebraska have enrolled in the program. The following goal and strategy address the need to provide support for broadband subscriptions for low-income households and to increase the number of providers offering affordable plans.

**Goal 1:** Increase the proportion of Nebraska households with access to affordable, quality broadband service.

**Strategy 1.2:** Using outreach, advocacy, and education, increase the number of broadband providers in Nebraska offering affordable plans for low-income and middle-class households.

Libraries, senior centers, and other community anchor institutions play an important role in supporting individuals who lack broadband access at home. Nebraska has 273 public libraries with 78% of libraries having a service population size of 2,499 or less. Nebraska's 145 multi-purpose senior centers can be a resource for older adults. Approximately two-thirds of the state's senior centers provide Wi-Fi access. The following goal and strategies address the need to support efforts to improve broadband access in Nebraska's libraries and senior centers.

**Goal 2:** Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.

**Strategy 2.1:** Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.

### Online Accessibility of Public Resources

NBO recognizes the importance of public resources and understands that many webpages of public entities are not compliant with accessibility requirements. NBO will assess and improve its own webpages for compliance with these requirements and encourage and support digital equity partners to do the same. Another method to improve online accessibility of public resources is to improve their availability to the public.

**Goal 2:** Improve public internet access in Nebraska communities.

**Strategy 2.1:** Increase the proportion of internet access points available for public use in Nebraska communities.

**Strategy 2.2:** Increase awareness of accessibility issues with state agency and local government websites.

### Digital Literacy & Privacy and Security

Most Nebraskans are very confident or somewhat confident in their ability to complete tasks using the internet. Respondents to the Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey were asked to indicate how confident they were at completing 11 internet tasks. Members of many covered populations were generally less confident in their ability to complete tasks. There are several

digital skills programs and resources available in Nebraska. However, these programs and resources may not meet the specific needs of covered populations or members of covered populations may not be aware of them. Because technology is continually evolving, Nebraskans need to keep up on the development of digital skills. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is an emerging technology that is changing the workplace. Training in this new technology will be vital to ensure that the state's workforce can use AI productively and safely. The following goal and strategy address the need to improve the technological skills of Nebraskans including the development of a skilled workforce.

**Goal 4:** Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.

**Strategy 4.1:** Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.

**Strategy 4.2:** Support the development or expansion of privacy and security training programs for Nebraskans.

The use of telehealth technologies could improve access to care in areas of the state which face shortages of health care professionals. The increased use of telehealth technologies such as remote patient monitoring could also improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities. The following goal and strategy address the need to increase the use of telehealth technologies.

**Goal 5:** Increase the use of telehealth technologies in Nebraska to increase access to care in underserved areas and to reduce health disparities.

**Strategy 5.1:** Support efforts by Nebraska hospitals, healthcare providers, associations, and other stakeholders to increase the use of telehealth in Nebraska.

### Privacy and Security

Fewer Nebraskans are very confident in their ability to use privacy and security practices. Respondents to the Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey were most confident in using strong passwords with 47% feeling very confident. Most training on privacy and security practices is done through workplace programs. Smaller businesses and organizations may not offer privacy and security training. Those not in the workforce or those in jobs which do not require the use of technology likely do not receive training on the use of privacy and security practices. Additionally, many local governments in Nebraska need to strengthen their privacy and security practices. The following goals and strategies address the need to improve access to privacy and security training and resources.

**Goal 4:** Improve the technology skills of Nebraskans, including use of privacy and security practices.

**Strategy 4.1:** Encourage and support the development or expansion of programs which provide digital skills training and support to covered populations.

### Device Affordability and Availability

Approximately 7.2% of Nebraska households have no digital devices. To be fully connected, most individuals need both a mobile and a large screen device. Approximately 20% of Nebraska households have no digital devices or only one digital device.

Residents of rural areas and census tracts with a high percent of low-income households have

lower rates of device access. Approximately 26.4% of rural Nebraska residents have either no device or one type of device versus 16.8% of residents of urban residents.

The affordability of digital devices is a significant barrier for low-income households. Options for low-cost devices or device repair in Nebraska are limited, especially outside of Omaha. The following goal and strategies address the need to expand options for low-cost devices or device repair in Nebraska.

**Goal 3:** Increase the percentage of Nebraska households with applicable internet devices.

**Strategy 3.1:** Address barriers to the development or expansion of programs which refurbish and repair digital devices and/or distribute new devices to members of covered populations.

## 6 Conclusion

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This plan presents how Nebraska will achieve its vision of enabling digital opportunities in the state:

*Nebraskans effectively use broadband to improve their lives and grow the economy.*

Nebraska's greatest asset is its people. The planning process brought together many people and organizations. Through the planning process, stakeholders learned more about issues related to digital access and skills, formed or strengthened relationships, and built capacity to engage in implementing regional plans and the state plan. NBO and NITC would like to thank everyone who participated in the planning process.

## 7 Appendices

### Organizations with which the Digital Equity Team Collaborated [Requirement 5 (cont)]

Civil Rights Organizations	
Civic Nebraska	Empowerment Network
Disability Rights Nebraska	Nebraska Advisory Commission to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
Community Anchor Institutions	
Agnes Robinson Waterloo Public Library	Louisville Public Library
Ainsworth Public Library	Loup City Public Library
Ainsworth Senior Center	Lyman Public Library
Albion Public Library	Lynch Public Library
Alice M Farr Library	Lyons Public Library
Alliance Public Library	Madison Public Library
Ansley Township Library	Maltman Memorial Public Library
Arapahoe Public Library	Maxine White-Sutherland Public Library
Arcadia Township Library	McCook Public Library
Arlington Public Library	Mead Public Library
Arthur County Library	Meadow Grove Public Library
Ashland Public Library	Mid-Plains Community College
Atkinson Public Library	Millard Branch Library
Atkinson Senior Center	Milligan Public Library
Auburn Memorial Library	Minatare Public Library
Auld Public Library	Mitchell Public Library
Auld-Doudna Public Library	Morrill Public Library
Avoca Public Library	Morton-James Public Library
Axtell Public Library	Nancy Fawcett Memorial Library
Bancroft Public Library	Naper Public Library
Baright Public Library	Nehawka Public Library
Bartley Public Library	Nehawka Public Library
Bayard Public Library	Neligh Public Library
Beatrice Public Library	Nelson Public Library
Beaver City Public Library	Newman Grove Public Library
Beaver Crossing Community Library	Nigel Sprouse Memorial Library
Bellevue Public Library	Niobrara Public Library
Bennington Public Library	Norfolk Public Library
Big Springs Public Library	North Bend Public Library
Blair Public Library & Technology Center	North Loup Township Library
Bloomfield Public Library	North Platte Public Library
Blue Hill Public Library	Northeast Community College
Blue Rivers Area Agency on Aging	Oakland Public Library
Bob and Wauneta Burkley Library	Oconto Public Library
Boyd County Senior Center	Odell Public Library
Brenizer Public Library	Omaha Public Library
Bridgeport Public Library	Omaha Public Library
Broadwater Public Library	Omaha Public Schools

Broken Bow Public Library	Omaha-AV Sorensen Branch Library
Brumbaugh Public Library	Omaha-Benson Branch Library
Bruning Public Library	Omaha-Bess Johnson Branch Library
Bruun Memorial Library	Omaha-Charles B. Washington Branch Library
Butler Memorial Library, Cambridge	Omaha-Florence Branch Library
Byron Public Library	Omaha-Genealogy Room
Campbell Public Library	Omaha-Library Administrative Building
Carter Lake Public Library	Omaha-Millard Branch Library
Cedar Rapids Public Library	Omaha-Milton Abrahams Branch Library
Central City Public Library	Omaha-Saddleback Branch Library
Central Community College	Omaha-South Omaha Library
Central Plains Regional Library System	Omaha-W. Clarke Swanson Branch Library
Ceresco Community Library	Omaha-Willa Cather Branch Library
Chadron Public Library	O'Neill Public Library
Chappell Memorial Library & Art Gallery	Orchard Public Library
Charles Drew Health Center	Ord Township Library
Clarks Public Library	Osceola Public Library
Clarkson Public Library	Oshkosh Public Library
Clay Center Public Library	Osmond Public Library
Clearwater Public Library	Overton Community Library
Columbus Public Library	Oxford Public Library
Comstock Senior Center "The Den"	Palisade Public Library
Comstock Township Library	Palmer Public Library
Cordelia B Preston Memorial Library	Palmyra Memorial Library
Council Bluffs Community School District	Papillion Public Library
Cravath Memorial Library	Pawnee City Public Library
Crawford Public Library	Paxton Public Library
Creighton Public Library	Petersburg Public Library
Crete Public Library	Pilger Public Library
Crete Public Library	Plainview Public Library
Culbertson Public Library	Plattsmouth Public Library
Dakota City Public Library	Plattsmouth Public Library
Dalton Public Library	Plymouth Public Library
Davenport Public Library	Polk Public Library
Davies Memorial Library	Ponca Carnegie Library
Daykin Public Library	Potter Public Library
Dorchester Public Library	Prairie Pioneer Center
Dundy County Library	Primrose Public Library
Dvoracek Memorial Library	Ravenna Public Library
Dwight Community Library	Raymond A Whitwer Tilden Public Library
Eastern Township Library	Rising City Community Library
Elgin Public Library	Rock County Public Library
Elm Creek Public Library	Rock County Senior Center
Elmwood Public Library	Rushville Public Library
Elwood Public Library	Sargent Township Library
Emerson Public Library	Schuyler Public Library
Eustis Public Library	Scotia Public Library & Heritage Center

Ewing Township Library	Scribner Public Library
Exeter Public Library	Senior Center-Callaway
Fairbury Public Library	Fullerton Public Library
Fairfield Public Library	Seven Valleys Senior Center
Fairmont Public Library	Seward Memorial Library
Faith Memorial Library	Shelby Community Library
Falls City Library & Arts Center	Shelton Public Library
Farnam Public Library	Sherman County Senior Center
Finch Memorial Library	Shubert Public Library
Fort Calhoun Public Library	Sidney Public Library
Franklin Library	Silver Creek Township Library
Franklin Public Library	Sioux County Public Library
Senior Classics of Valley County "Ord Senior Center"	Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council (SIMPCO)
Gardner Public Library	Snyder Public Library
Garfield County Library	South Sioux City Public Library
Geneva Public Library	Southeast Nebraska Collaborative
Genoa Public Library	Spalding Public Library
Gering Public Library	Spalding Senior Center
Gibbon Public Library	Spencer Township Library
Gilbert Public Library	Springbank Township Library
Gordon City Library	Springfield Memorial Library
Gothenburg Public Library	St Edward Public Library
Grand Island Public Library	St Paul Public Library
Grant County Library	Stanton Public Library
Greeley Village Public Library	Stella Community Library
Greenwood Public Library	Sterling Public Library
Gresham Public Library	Stratton Public Library
Gretna Public Library	Stromsburg Public Library
Hartington Public Library	Struckman-Baatz Public Library
Harvard Public Library	Stuart Township Library
Hastings Memorial Library	Sunshine Township Library
Hastings Public Library	Superior Public Library
Hayes Center Public Library	Sutton Memorial Library
Heartland United Way	Syracuse Public Library
Hebron Secrest Library	Table Rock Public Library
Hemingford Public Library	Taylor Public Library
Hickman Reading Centre	Tecumseh Public Library
Hildreth Public Library	Thomas County Library
Hoesch Memorial Public Library	Three Rivers Library System
Holdrege Area Public Library	Trenton Public Library
Hooker County Library	Tucker Memorial Library
Hooper Public Library	Ulysses Township Library
House Memorial Library	Unadilla Community Library
Howells Public Library	Valentine Area Community Senior Center
Hruska Memorial Public Library	Valentine Public Library
Humphrey Public Library	Valley Public Library

Indianola Public Library	Valparaiso Public Library
Jackson Public Library	Verdigre Public Library
Jennifer Reinke Public Library	Village of Brady Public Library
Jensen Memorial Library	Village of Verdon Library
John A Stahl Library	Virgil Biegert Public Library
John G Smith Memorial Library	Wahoo Public Library
John Rogers Memorial Library	Walthill Public Library
Johnson Community Center & Library	Wauneta Public Library
Karlen Memorial Library	Waverly Community Library
Kathleen Lute Public Library	Wayne Public Library
Kearney Public Library	Webermeier Memorial Library
Keene Memorial Library	Weeping Water Public Library
Keith County Chamber of Commerce	Wheeler Central Public Schools
Keya Paha County Library	Wilcox Public Library
Kilgore Memorial Library	Wilson Public Library
Kimball Public Library	Wilsonville Public Library
Klye Burt Memorial Library, Curtis	Wisner Public Library
La Vista Public Library	Wymore Public Library
Laurel Community Learning Center	Young at Heart Senior Center
Leigh Public Library	Yutan Public Library
Lewellen Public Library	South Central Agency on Aging
Lexington Public Library	Papillion Landing Digital Library
Lied Battle Creek Public Library	Blue Rivers Area Agency on Aging
Lied Carroll Library	Arlington multi-purpose senior center
Lied Imperial Public Library	Bellevue Senior Community Center
Lied Lincoln Township Library	Bennington Senior Center
Lied Pierce Public Library	Camelot Friendship Center
Lied Randolph Public Library	Corrigan Senior Center
Lied Scottsbluff Public Library	Eagle Senior Center
Lied Tekamah Public Library	Florence Senior Center Omaha
Lied Winside Public Library	La Vista Senior Center
Lincoln City Libraries	Millard Community Senior Center
Litchfield Public Library	Refugee Empowerment Center
Little Priest Tribal College &	Northeast Nebraska Senior Citizens Center
Logan County Library	Golden Age Senior Center
Lois Johnson Memorial Library	Key Paha County Activity Center - Senior Center
Oconto Senior Center	
<b>County or Municipal Government</b>	
Blaine County	Valley County Sheriff's Department
Blaine County Sheriff's Department	Village Ashton
Boyd County	Village of Anoka
Boyd County Sheriff's Department	Village of Anselmo
Brown County	Village of Ansley
Brown County Sheriff's Department	Village of Arcadia
Cherry County	Village of Arnold
Cherry County Sheriff's Department	Village of Bartlett
City of Ainsworth	Village of Berwyn

City of Atkinson	Village of Brewster
City of Bassett	Village of Bristow
City of Bayard	Village of Burton
City of Bridgeport	Village of Butte
City of Broken Bow	Village of Callaway
City of Burwell	Village of Chambers
City of Council Bluffs	Village of Cody
City of Cozad	Village of Comstock
City of Dakota City	Village of Crookston
City of Franklin	Village of Dunning
City of Grand Island - Regional Planning	Village of Elyria
City of Grant	Village of Emerson
City of Imperial	Village of Emmet
City of Kimball	Village of Ericson
City of Long Pine	Village of Ewing
City of Loup City	Village of Greeley (Center)
City of Minatare	Village of Gross
City of O'Neill	Village of Halsey
City of Omaha Planning Department	Village of Hazard
City of Ord	Village of Homer
City of Sargent	Village of Hubbard
City of Sidney	Village of Inman
City of South Sioux City	Village of Jackson
City of Sutton	Village of Johnstown
City of Valentine	Village of Kilgore
Custer County	Village of Litchfield
Custer County Sheriff's Department	Village of Lynch
Dakota County, NE	Village of Mason City
Gage County	Village of Merna
Garfield County	Village of Merriman
Garfield County Sheriff's Department	Village of Monowi
Greeley County	Village of Morrill
Greeley County Sheriff's Department	Village of Naper
Harlan County Board of Supervisors	Village of Nenzel
Holt County	Village of Newport
Holt County Sheriff's Department	Village of North Loup
Keya Paha County	Village of Oconto
Keya Paha County Sheriff's Department	Village of Page
League of Nebraska Municipalities	Village of Rockville
Lincoln Co	Village of Scotia
Loup County	Village of Spalding
Loup County Sheriff's Department	Village of Spencer
Nebraska Association of County Officials	Village of Springview
Phelps Co.	Village of Stuart
Rock County	Village of Table Rock
Rock County Sheriff's Department	Village of Taylor
Sherman County	Village of Wolbach

Sherman County Sheriff's Department	Village of Wood Lake
Valley County	Wheeler County
<b>Economic Development Organizations</b>	
Central Nebraska Economic Development (CNEDD)	Omaha Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA)
AIM Institute	Omaha Public Power District
Auburn Development Council	Ord Economic Development
Burwell Economic Development	Panhandle Area Development District (PADD)
Cairo Economic Development	Siouxland Chamber of Commerce
Canopy South	Keith County Area Development
HDR Engineering	Adams Bank and Trust
Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council (SIMPCO)	South Central Economic Development District (SCEDD)
Iowa's West Coast Initiative (IWCI)	South Sioux City Chamber of Commerce
Siouxland Economic Development Corporation (SEDC)	Southeast Economic Nebraska Development District (SENDDD)
Lamp Rynearson	St Paul Economic Development
Nebraska Department of Economic Development	Twin Cities Development
Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District (NENEDD)	West Central Nebraska Development District, Inc. (WCNDD)
North 24th Street BID	
<b>Foundations</b>	
Native Futures Foundation	
<b>Health or Telehealth Organization (Direct Service and Policy focus)</b>	
Banner Health	Panhandle Public Health District
BryanHealth	Region V Services
Faith Regional Health Services	Rural Health Advisory Commission
Four Corners Regional Health Department	United Healthcare of Nebraska
McCook Community Hospital	University of Kansas Medical Center
Merrick Medical Center	North Platte Hospital
University of Nebraska-Omaha - Human Rights & Relations	UNMC Medical Center for Public Health Disparities
One World Community Health Center	Veteran Administration Facility
<b>Hispanic-serving Institutions</b>	
Latino Center of the Midlands	
<b>Indian Tribe, Alaska Native Entity, or Native Hawaiian Organization</b>	
Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition	Santee Sioux Nation
Omaha Tribe of Nebraska	Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition
Ponca Tribe of Nebraska	Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska Tribal Consultation
<b>Industry Representative or Association (501c6)</b>	
Allo Communications	Nedelco
AT&T Mobility	Network Nebraska
Aureon Network Service	Nextlink
BLink Bluffs Council Bluffs WiFi	Nextlink Internet

Cellco Partnership DBA Verizon W	Pinpoint Communications
CenturyLink Communications (Lumen Technologies)	Precision IT
Charter Communications (Spectrum)	Quantum Fiber (Lumen Technologies)
Cogent Communications	QudraNet Enterprises
Comcast Cable	Rembolt Lawfirm
Cox Communications	Spectrum (Charter)
Eagle Communications	Spiral Solutions & Technologies
Ethos Connected	StarLink
FiberNet Communications	Suddenlink Communications (Altice)
Future Wireless Technologies of Nebraska, Inc. (NextLink Internet)	Windstream Communications LLC (Kinetic Fiber) -Omaha
Google Fiber-Omaha	T-Mobile USA, Inc. (also Sprint)
Great Plains Communication	Unite Private Networks
Hughes Network Systems	Universal Broadband Consulting
Huntel Communications	US Cellular Grand Island
Mainstay	Verizon Communications
Mediacom Communications	Woods Aitken Law Firm
Nebraska Rural Broadband Alliance	Xcelerate Networks
Nebraska Telecommunications Association	Zito Media
NebraskaLink (OPTK Networks)	Telecommunications Access Iowa
Google Fiber - KC	JAB Wireless (dba Rise Broadband)

**Institutions of Higher Education**

Central Community College - Hastings	Southeast Community College
Digital Express Metropolitan Community College	Metropolitan Community College Digital Express
Mid Plains Community College - Ogallala	University of Nebraska Gerontology
Mid Plains Community College - Imperial	University of Nebraska - Lincoln
University of Nebraska at Omaha Center for Public Affairs Research	University of Nebraska-Omaha - Cultural, Ethnicity & Social Justice
Nebraska Innovation Studio	Wayne State College
Northeast Community College	York University
Oklahoma State University	

**Local Education Agency**

Crete Public Schools	ESU 1
Educational Service Unit 17	Iowa School for the Deaf
Emerson-Hubbard Community School District	JAG (NE)
Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired	Lincoln High School Community Learning Centers
ESU 11	Made New MakerSpace
ESU 2	Ponca Public Schools
ESU 9	Prairie Stem
Grand Island Public Schools	South Sioux City Community School District
Homer Community School District	Western Nebraska Community College
iJAG (IA)	Wheeler Central Public Schools

**Nonprofit Organization (501c3)**

AIM Institute	KROC Center (Salvation Army-Omaha)
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Boys & Girls Club	Lutheran Family Services - North Omaha
Brown County Agriculture Society	Mentor Nebraska
Catholic Charities	Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA)
Center for People	Nebraska Tech Collaborative
Center for Rural Affairs	NorthStar Foundation
Central Plains Library Systems	Prairie STEM
DoSpace	Simple Foundation
Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership	SmartGen Society
Education SuperHighway	Southeast Library System
Generation Diamond	Step Up Youth Entrepreneurial Program
Girls Inc.	Tech Boomers
Highlander Accelerator	Teen Tech Center
Holt County TeamMates	Three Rivers Library System
Hope Center for Kids	Western Library System
ichoosepurple	YMCA-Metro Omaha
Intercultural Senior Center	Blue Valley Community Action
Southeast Nebraska Community Action	
<b>Organizations that Represent Covered Populations</b>	
AARP Nebraska	North Platte Hospital
Great Plains ADA Center	North Platte Opportunity Center
AARP Omaha	Northeast Nebraska AAA & ADRC
AARP-Iowa State Office - Des Moines	Nutrien Ag Solutions
AARP-Nebraska State Office - Omaha	Omaha Refugee Task Force
Assistive Technology Partnership	Open Door Mission
Boyd County Veteran	Outlook Nebraska
Chase Co Highschool	PAKS
Civic Nebraska	Ralston Senior Center
Colglazier Farms	ReConnect, Inc.
Department of Health and Human Services	Region 2
Disability Rights Nebraska	Restoring Dignity (Ukrainians)
Eastern Nebraska Office of Aging	RISE (Prison Re-entry)
Goodwill Omaha	Rural Broadband Task Force
Growing Community Connections	Scouler
Growing Community Connections	Seven Oaks at Notre Dame Housing
Hearing Loss Association of America	Siouxland Regional Transit System (SRTS)
Hilltop Estates	South Central Nebraska AAA & ADRC
HUD/LOACP	Southern Sudan Community Action
Immanuel Courtyard	State of Iowa Department for the Blind
Immigrant Legal Center	Syngenta
Intercultural Senior Center	Together, Inc.
Keith County Veterans Office	Trails West CASA
LeaDIVERSITY	United Way of the Midlands
League of Human Dignity Office - Kearney	University of Nebraska Extension, Dakota County
League of Human Dignity Office - Norfolk	Urban League of Nebraska
Madsion County Veteran Services	Weitbrecht

Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired	Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Veteran Services Officers	West Central Ne Area Agency on Aging
Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services	Regional Dept. of Health & Human Services Office - Ainsworth
Nebraska Vocational Rehab	
<b>Other</b>	
Niobrara Valley Vineyards	Emspace + Lovgren
Ridder Herefords	iFixOmaha, LLC
Nebraska Governor's Office	Iowa Utilities Board - Relay Iowa
Nebraska Public Service Commission	4AgTEch
Nebraska Library Commission	Offutt Airforce Base (Veteran/Military)
National Telecommunications and Information Administration	Western Iowa Network Affordable Connectivity Program & Lifeline Programs
Nebraska Department of Transportation	Western Iowa Network
Nebraska Rural Electric Association	ORBT - Metro
Nebraska Farm Bureau	ZSCALER Inc.
Nebraska Department of Health and Human Service State Unit On Aging	Iowa Utilities Board - Telecommunications Access Iowa
Federal Communications Commission	South Central Public Power District
Nebraska State Unit on Aging	Agriculture Technician
Linguist Technologies	Hunnicuttt Farms
Nebraska Attorney General's Office	Kimball County Transit Service
Nebraska Information Technology Commission	Nebraska Department of Correctional Services
Nebraska Board of Parole	Keya Paha Rancher
Nebraska State GIS Board	Precision Ag Technician/Tech support
Nebraska Legislature	Holt County Farmer
Nebraska Department of Agriculture	Loup County Rancher
Office of the Public Guardian	Banker
<b>Predominantly Black Institution</b>	
Eastern African Development Association of Nebraska	
<b>Public Housing Authority</b>	
Municipal Housing Authority of Council Bluffs Iowa	
Omaha Housing Authority	
Taylor Housing Committee	
<b>Workforce Development Organization</b>	
Heartland Workforce Solutions	

## Public Comments & Responses [Requirement 16]

#	Response	Actions taken
1	<p>12/6/23</p> <p>Hi, Jason. Were you on the Community Council Zoom meeting this morning? I am just trying to make sure I have everyone who attended in the minutes. Also, I received your written comments. I will double-check the library information you cited. Also, I appreciate your comments on affordability. I will share your comments with the Nebraska Broadband Office. Thanks!</p> <p>12/21/23 Jason,</p> <p>I looked over the information on libraries. The Nebraska Library Commission annually collects data from public libraries in Nebraska. Some of the data came from the annual public library survey. The Library Commission also conducted another survey of libraries on digital equity assets and programming. The percentages were calculated as a percent of respondents. I will rework that section, so it is more clear where the data is from and the number of respondents.</p>	<p>Information on libraries was rewritten to be clearer.</p>
2	<p>December 21, 2023</p> <p>Delberta,</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to read the Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan and to submit comments. Broadband availability and affordability are the two greatest barriers to digital opportunities in Nebraska. I have forwarded your e-mail to the Nebraska Broadband Office. They are setting up a grant program to provide funding to providers to deploy broadband to unserved areas. They can provide more information about the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) grant program and if your location would be eligible., 2023</p>	<p>NITC forwarded e-mail to NBO for consideration.</p>
3	<p>December 19, 2023</p> <p>Myrtle,</p> <p>Thank so much for taking the time to read the Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan and to submit comments. I also would be lost without internet access. Those who are not able to use high-speed internet in their home either because it is not available or is not affordable are unable to access many services and are at a disadvantage. Hopefully, through the Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan and through the efforts of the Nebraska Broadband Office and Nebraska Public Service Commission all locations will have high-speed internet service available and more households will subscribe to internet service.</p> <p>I agree that the options about the plan sections are a little confusing. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration requires states to track and report comments received, including the relevant sections of the plan.</p>	<p>No changes made to plan</p>
4	<p>E-mail sent December 11, 2023</p> <p>Margot,</p>	<p>No changes made to plan</p>

	<p>Thank you for taking the time to read the Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan and to submit comments. I also was surprised that 74.8% of Nebraska’s population falls into one or more of the covered populations. The U.S. Census Bureau calculated the percentages for each state and county in the U.S. The information is available at the Digital Equity Population viewer at <a href="https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42">https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c5e6cf675865464a90ff1573c5072b42</a>. The total figure of 74.8% is not calculated by totaling each individual population. It takes into account that many people fall into more than one covered population.</p> <p>This has helped me see digital inclusion as broader than just making sure that everyone has access to an internet connection and a device. There are issues such as affordability of internet service, keeping up on new technologies, and using good privacy and security practices that are relevant to a much larger segment of the state’s population.</p>	
5	<p>E-mail sent Dec. 19, 2023 Georgia,</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to read the Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan and submit comments. Broadband availability and affordability are definitely the top two issues related to digital opportunities in Nebraska. I am hopeful that we will be able to make progress on those issues through the combined resources of the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) grant, the State Digital Equity Capacity grant and other broadband deployment funding sources.</p>	No changes made to plan
6	<p>December 19, 2023 Jack,</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to read the Nebraska Digital Opportunities plan and submit comments. I understand your frustration with broadband service available in your area. I have forwarded your comments to the Nebraska Broadband Office. Someone from the Nebraska Broadband Office will be reaching out to you with information on their work to improve broadband availability.</p>	Forwarded to NBO for assistance. No changes made to plan
7	<p>E-mail sent on December 19, 2023--Charles,</p> <p>Thank you for submitting comments on Nebraska’s Digital Opportunities Plan. We will carefully consider all public comments as well as feedback from NTIA as we finalize our plan.</p>	No changes made to plan
8	<p>December 19, 2023--President Gotschall,</p> <p>Thank you for submitting comments on the draft Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan. I’d also like to thank you and Central Community College for your many programs which are helping residents of Nebraska improve their digital skills. As we switch from planning to implementation, the Nebraska Broadband Office will assume responsibility for the digital equity program. There will likely be opportunities to partner with Central Community College and the state’s other community colleges as the State of Nebraska begins to implement the plan. Enjoy the holidays and have a happy New Year!</p>	No changes made to plan.

9	<p>E-mail sent on December 19, 2023--Dave,  Thanks so much for your thoughtful comments! Enjoy the holidays!</p>	<p>Shared with NBO for consideration. No changes made to plan.</p>
10	<p>December 22, 2023 Karisa,  Thank you for taking the time to read the draft Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan and to submit comments. We will review and consider all comments as we make revisions to the draft plan. The implementation plan includes forming an advisory group. The advisory group may form work groups to gather additional information and make additional recommendations. Building a sustainable device ecosystem may likely be one area that is addressed.</p>	<p>No changes made to plan. Met with author to further discuss their comments.</p>
11	<p>Dec. 2, 2023--Jina,  Thank you so much for your thoughtful comments.</p>	<p>Additional information was added to asset inventory. Minor revisions made to needs assessment section including adding headings to more clearly identify the barriers listed. Deleted sentence about adults over 80 and digital skills. Many of the suggestions included didn't require changes to the plan but may be considered as NBO begins implementation. A more detailed response is being drafted and will be sent to AARP Nebraska.</p>
12	<p>E-mail sent on Jan. 2, 2023 --Jenny,  Thank you so much for your thoughtful comments.</p>	<p>No changes made to plan. Meeting may be scheduled to discuss further.</p>
13	<p>E-mail sent on Dec. 2, 2023--Carla,  Thank you so much for your comments and all of your work on this grant!</p>	<p>Most of the minor changes suggested were made.</p>
14	<p>E-mail sent on Jan. 3, 2023--Kevin,  Thank you for taking the time to read the Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan, share a summary with your readers, and to submit comments. We will be reviewing all comments as we revise our plan.</p>	<p>No changes made to plan.</p>

15	<p>Jan. 3, 2023--Tate,</p> <p>Thank you for comments on the Nebraska Digital Opportunities plan and for all of your work on the grant.</p> <p>Most of the minor changes suggested were made. The Nebraska Broadband Office will work with the economic development districts to explore ways to have them participate in the implementation phase. The Rural Broadband Task Force is only authorized to prepare and submit a report every two years. It has no authority to engage in expansion initiatives. The Nebraska Broadband Office will consider working with the University of Nebraska on device refurbishment.</p>	Most minor suggested changes made.
16	<p>Jan. 3, 2023--Iris,</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to read the Nebraska Digital Opportunities Plan and to submit comments. We will be reviewing all comments as we revise our plan.</p>	No changes made to plan

## Links to Regional Plans, Asset Inventories, Survey Report, and Focus Group Report

### Regional Digital Equity Plans

- [Central Nebraska Economic Development District Digital Equity Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- [Metropolitan Area Planning Agency Digital Equity Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- [Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District and Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council Digital Equity Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- [Panhandle Area Development District Digital Equity Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- [South Central Economic Development District Digital Equity Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- [Southeast Nebraska Development District Digital Equity Plan \(PDF\)](#)
- [West Central Nebraska Development District Digital Equity Plan \(PDF\)](#)

### Asset Inventories

- [Central Nebraska Economic Development District Asset Inventory \(Excel\)](#)
- [Metropolitan Area Planning Agency Asset Inventory \(Excel\)](#)
- [Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District and Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council Asset Inventory \(Excel\)](#)
- [Panhandle Area Development District Asset Inventory \(Excel\)](#)
- [South Central Nebraska Development District Asset Inventory \(Excel\)](#)
- [South Central Nebraska Development District Asset Inventory-ISPs \(Excel\)](#)
- [Southeast Nebraska Development District Asset Inventory \(Excel\)](#)
- [West Central Nebraska Development District Asset Inventory \(Excel\)](#)

### Survey and Focus Groups

- [Nebraska Digital Access and Skills Survey Report](#)
- [Focus Group Report: Understanding the Digital Equity Needs of Covered Populations in Nebraska](#)

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- Nebraska Broadband Availability Map. Available at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7dcc2182601a4b339ab687f673a9811f>
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