TEAM KENTUCKY®

EDUCATION AND LABOR CABINET

DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

STATE DIGITAL EQUITY PLANNING GRANT PROGRAM

MARCH 2024

TEAM KENTUCKY®

DIGITAL EQUITY INITIATIVE

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1 Executive Summary

Background

The Commonwealth of Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (EWDC) is eligible for the State Digital Equity Planning Grant, federal award ID number 21-30-DP351. During a restructuring of the EWDC, the Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC) emerged as the lead agency responsible for administering the State Digital Equity Plan. The Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program is administered separately under the guidance of the Kentucky Office of Broadband Development (OBD). The ELC has collaborated with the OBD while developing the Kentucky Digital Equity Plan (the Plan). BEAD and Digital Equity funds will be used to implement broadband infrastructure expansion and digital equity/digital inclusion programs as part of the "Better Internet Plan" across the Commonwealth.

The ELC is the ideal candidate to administer the Kentucky State Digital Equity Planning Grant. This is because it has extensive oversight of pivotal agencies, programs, and relationships crucial for driving digital equity in Kentucky. The Cabinet will ensure a holistic approach that addresses the multifaceted dimensions of digital equity by seamlessly coordinating efforts across the spectrum of workforce development, education, libraries, vocational rehabilitation, and apprenticeships coupled with existing relationships with non-profits, local workforce development entities, labor organizations, employers, colleges and universities and other organizations that support covered populations. To learn more about the agencies and offices under the purview of ELC see Appendix XI and XII.

This Plan serves to set forth measurable objectives that will impact and interact with the Commonwealth's (i) economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes; (ii) education outcomes, (iii) health outcomes; (iv) civic and social engagement; and (v) delivery of essential services. Before the Plan's development, ELC's outreach and engagement activities attempted to reach all Covered Populations (as defined in the Digital Equity Act).

The Commonwealth of Kentucky is committed to making meaningful progress toward achieving digital equity as one of our top priorities. Through the Better Internet Plan, Kentucky will ensure all Kentuckians have access to reliable high-speed internet and the right devices to access that technology while also ensuring necessary resources are allocated to identify barriers to affordability and ensure there is training and support available to develop our citizens' digital skills.

Kentucky is dedicated to achieving our vision in partnership with our trusted state, regional, and community partners through robust public-private partnerships.

Bridging the Digital Divide in Kentucky

The Commonwealth has created a Digital Equity Plan in collaboration with Kentuckians to ensure that every voice is heard, and issues related to internet use are adequately addressed over the next five years as we address our digital connectivity needs.

Pathway to Developing the Digital Equity Plan

Our pathway has been an inclusive one summarized at a high level below:

1. Establishing Digital Equity Leadership and Support

- Created the Office of Systems Equity in the Education and Labor Cabinet/Department of Workforce Development (ELC/DWD); and
- Developed a Digital Equity Core Workgroup consisting of leaders from entities that provide services/support to covered populations, as well as lived experts.

2. Understanding the State of Digital Equity in Kentucky

- Partnered with the Kentucky Office of Broadband Development (OBD) to facilitate a 14-stop listening tour to gather information on digital equity issues and opportunities.
- Collected information about organizations across Kentucky that provide digital inclusion services via an online asset inventory questionnaire.
- Conducted a statewide residential survey to determine the state of internet use in Kentucky and any barriers faced by Kentuckians.

- Partnered with community anchor institutions to conduct 17 focus groups to learn more about the lived experiences of covered populations.
- Met with diverse stakeholders across the state in over 60 meetings and stakeholder events, resulting in almost 500 stakeholder collaborators.
- Held a Two-day Strategic Planning Session with the Digital Equity Core Workgroup and trusted, statewide community partners to determine the actions to support the objectives and strategies in July 2023.
- Provided two 30-day public comment periods on the draft plan.

Key Impacts and Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement	Key Impacts
14-Stop Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour	Gained valuable insight about the challenges faced by individuals from covered populations (including justice involved individuals because incarcerated individuals could not join), internet service providers (ISP), businesses, community-based organizations, libraries, city and county officials through personal stories and digitally captured responses during facilitated discussion. Collaborated with the OBD, Kentucky Office of Adult Education, Connected Nation, Area Development Districts, and others to coordinate 14 in-person and two virtual sessions.
Stakeholder Meetings	Meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders like Area Development Districts (ADDs), various State agencies, Kentucky League of Cities, the Kentucky Association of Counties, Kentucky Nonprofit Network, S.O.A.R., Goodwill, United Way, Red Bird Mission, Louisville Housing Authority, Louisville Metro Innovation Office, The Wesley House, Somali Community Center, Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Volunteers for America, Kentucky AARP, Life Learning Center, Northern Kentucky Digital Literacy Workgroup, Catholic Charities, BankON Louisville, AT&T, Alta Fiber, Apple, Esperanza Latino Center, and La Casita Community Center to understand their services, the needs of those they serve, and gauge interest in partnering. There were targeted stakeholder convenings held in partnership with the OBD with ADDs, County Judge Executives, and Mayors, as well as internet service providers.
Two-day Strategic Planning Session	The members of the state core-work group and trusted community partners met for a two-day retreat to validate and refine the Plan objectives and strategies as well as identify measurable actions that support the objectives. State Digital Equity Core Workgroup attendees represented all covered populations and included leadership from S.O.A.R., Goodwill, United Way, Red Bird Mission, Northern Kentucky Hispanic/ student lived expert, Office of Adult Education, Louisville Metro Innovation Office, Department for Libraries & Archives, Jobs for Veterans State Grant, Career Development Office, Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS), Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board, Department of Workforce Development, Connected Nation, NTIA Federal Program Officer for Kentucky & West Virginia, and the OBD.
Focus Groups	Overall, findings from Goodwill Industries, Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, United Way, Jobs for Veterans, and Red Bird Missions highlight recurring themes such as the need for improved broadband service, concerns about security and scams, confusion about where to access services, multi-language support, and a preference for in-person support, particularly in underserved areas. Participants from each covered population from across the state were able to speak their minds and sought more awareness about available programs and resources for education on scams and cybersecurity. Participants stressed the need for in-person instruction from community partners, particularly for seniors.

Asset Inventory	In gathering the various organizations across the state and the services they provide, ELC/DWD learned that there is support available to covered populations as well as gaps in services. The range of responses came from nonprofit organizations, transit authorities, university programs, and telecommunication entities. The asset inventory currently has 137 entries. This effort will be ongoing to build upon this preliminary data and become a statewide, interactive resource for all Kentuckians to identify how to access devices, the internet, subsidy programs, digital literacy, and cybersecurity programs as well as digital skills training to support workforce goals.
Residential Survey	The residential survey gathered data on the needs of individuals from covered populations and received statewide distribution support from numerous trusted community partners and stakeholders. Examples of these efforts included being sent out internally through the Governor's communication team, AARP was able to distribute to their network of 121,000 members, the Life Learning Center of Covington made it a part of their intake process for certain clients, statewide email campaigns, local and municipal governments.

Key Statewide Findings on the State of Digital Equity in Kentucky

- Over 137 institutions provide digital inclusion services across Kentucky. Of those, 42% offer general digital literacy training, and 22% offer cybersecurity training. (Appendix II).
- According to the ELC/DWD 2023 Residential Technology Survey, 80% of Kentuckians subscribe to fixed home internet. Broadband affordability serves as a significant barrier to home internet adoption. While many households may have access to broadband, not all are able to afford it.

Key Findings on Covered Populations[1]

Kentucky has 3.7 million residents. 83.8% of the population meet the criteria to be considered a member of a covered population. The ELC/DWD's stakeholder engagement and research efforts revealed that twenty percent of Kentuckians identified as covered populations are not adopting the internet at home[2]. The leading barriers to internet adoption for covered populations are a lack of access to high-speed networks, affordability of high-speed internet and devices, and a lack of digital skills. Below is a breakdown of individual covered population findings:

- **Individuals who live in low-income households** represent over a quarter of the population (25.7% or 1,128,386 Kentuckians). Key findings indicated that the monthly cost of broadband was a barrier to adoption for low-income individuals. Due to limited financial resources, they prioritized necessities like food and housing over the cost of a home broadband subscription. Additionally, a lack of information and understanding of affordable programs such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) resulted in a reluctance to adopt it.
- **Aging individuals** – Represent nearly a quarter (24.3%) of the population, with most residing in western Kentucky. Census data indicated that the state has been shifting older from 2010 to 2020. Key findings indicate that among aging populations, the leading barriers to broadband adoption were digital literacy and the cost of broadband.
- **Incarcerated individuals** – In 2022, Kentucky had a total correctional population of 95,479 including 32,351 incarcerated individuals and 63,128 on probation or parole. Key findings from focus groups indicate a primary barrier to broadband adoption was a lack of digital skills due to limited exposure to the internet while incarcerated. In a limited capacity, some county and regional jails are introducing restricted internet access to training programs.
- **Veterans** – There are currently 233,436 veterans residing in the Commonwealth. Research findings revealed that many veterans are not able to fully access or take advantage of the life-changing benefits that are available to them due to limited skills or access

[1]Covered Population data derived from One-Year Estimates from the 2022 American Community Survey; 2020 Decennial US Census Estimates; Vera Institute analysis of data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Kentucky Department of Corrections, 2022
[2]ELC/DWD 2023 Residential Technology Survey

to broadband. Furthermore, members of focus groups reported being directed by case workers to use the Internet for medical claims, despite having limited skills in this area.

- **Individuals with disabilities** – 18.1%, or 801,061, Kentuckians live with a disability, with a significant number residing in eastern Kentucky. In 2021, Kentucky ranked in the top five for rates of disability beneficiaries. Key findings indicate that a lack of reliable internet and accessibility tools limits access to telehealth services or remote jobs.
- **Individuals with a Language Barrier** – The census data shows that 5.9% of Kentucky residents have a language barrier. Major concerns for individuals who face language barriers include a lack of services offered in their native language and a digital skills gap.
- **Individuals of a racial or ethnic minority group** – Represent 17.8% of the population. Findings indicate that the leading barrier to adopting the Internet was the lack of computers.
- **Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area** – 41.3% of Kentuckians reside in a rural area. The primary barrier facing this population is that the monthly cost of service is too expensive, closely followed by not owning a computer that can access the internet.

What's Next

This Kentucky Digital Equity Plan is a plan for all Kentuckians. The Plan outlines the current state of digital equity; the various ways the Commonwealth sought input; insights about the unique needs of the communities across the Commonwealth; learnings from organizations already doing digital equity and technology work; and how we assessed what Kentucky needs to achieve digital access for all Kentuckians. This Plan outlines six objectives to work toward achieving digital equity for all Kentuckians.

1. Enhance broadband availability and affordability for covered populations. (OB1)
2. Ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians. (OB2)
3. Increase application accessibility and inclusivity to state and local government programs. (OB3)
4. Ensure that all Kentuckians are equipped to navigate the internet safely. (OB4)
5. Improve digital literacy for all covered populations in Kentucky. (OB5)
6. Empower all Kentuckians to develop the digital skills necessary for work and life. (OB6)

Additionally, this Plan provides strategies, actions, and impact measures to bridge the digital equity gap for covered populations.

[3]The alphanumeric code OB[number] represents the plan's method of categorizing its 6 objectives used throughout the plan. For instance, OB1 signifies Objective Number 1.

Objective 1 (OB1): Enhance broadband availability and affordability for covered populations.	
Primary Targeted Covered Population	• Individuals living in low-income households. • Individuals primarily residing in rural areas.
Key Actions	ELC/DWD will collaborate with local partners, including school districts, libraries, and workforce development boards, to promote low-cost programs to increase participation in the rural counties and low-income communities experiencing low ACP adoption rates and high covered population concentration: • Less than 10% in the first year • Less than 20% in the second year • Less than 30% in the third year (OB1-S4)[4] ELC/DWD will support and collaborate with the OBD by providing necessary reports and other strategies about covered populations' connectivity and affordability needs. The OBD is responsible for deploying broadband to all Kentuckians via BEAD and other programs. Refer to the Kentucky State Broadband Plan. (OB1-S1)
Success Measures	Increase broadband adoption by low-income individuals and individuals residing in rural areas by 2% annually. Current baseline data on affordability: • 47% of low-income persons and; • 44% of people residing in a rural area without broadband struggle with affording access A 3% increase in ACP participation a year in targeted counties among low-income individuals and individuals residing in rural areas annually. As of September 25, 2023, 50.1% of eligible households subscribed to the program. If ACP is discontinued, ELC/DWD will track the adoption rates for existing low-cost programs using provider supplied data.
Objective 2 (OB2): Ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians.	
Primary Targeted Covered Population	• Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group • Individuals who live in low-income households • Incarcerated individuals
Key Actions	• Partner with government agencies, schools, and private companies to develop a sustainable device "refresh cycles" framework that makes the devices available to covered populations at low cost. (OB2-S2) • Partner with key community stakeholders serving targeted covered populations to promote low-cost device ownership among ethnic minorities. (OB2-S1) • Prioritize outreach and awareness activities in rural areas or counties with more than 15% of households lacking household devices. (OB2-S2) • Support device upgrades to incarcerated individuals in partnership with DOC (OB2-S3).

[4] The alphanumeric code OB[number]-S[number] refers to the notation used to categorize objectives and corresponding strategies in the plan. See section 5.1 on page 50 for the complete list of objectives and related strategies for achieving the objectives.

Success Measures	• Increase computer ownership by individual members of a racial or ethnic minority group and individuals in rural areas by 3% each year in partnership with government agencies, schools, private companies and other stakeholders on low-cost or affordable devices. Based on current data: • 28% of racial or ethnic minorities and • 15% of individuals residing in rural areas do not own at least one device that can access the internet. • Increase the number of GEDs earned by incarcerated individuals annually from 369 to 450 by 2026
Objective 3 (OB3): Increase application accessibility and inclusivity to state and local government programs.	
Primary Targeted Covered Population	• Individuals with disabilities • Individuals with a language barrier
Key Actions	• Partner with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to conduct accessibility studies to determine the trends in accessibility of critical state government websites and/or resources every other year of the grant period. (OB3-S1) • Conduct open forums for state agencies and local organizations representing individuals with language barriers and disabilities to share best practices on enhancing accessibility and inclusivity of applications at least every other year. (OB3-S1) • Develop resources and periodic communications that quantify what constitutes a positive digital experience for individuals with disabilities. (OB3-S3) • Support libraries and trusted community partners to ensure they have the appropriate information, supplies, and community knowledge to help patrons and individuals from covered populations. (OB3-S5) • Encourage state agencies and nonprofits to create culturally sensitive materials in multiple formats and languages that reflect the communities they serve. (OB3-S5)
Success Measures	• Increased enrollment, participation, and engagement rates in critical state-run programs annually for individuals with disabilities and with a language barrier over the five-year period in partnership with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and other entities that serve covered populations. An increase of 3% a year from Kentuckians accessing government services. ELC/DWD's residential survey showed that only 19% of Kentuckians were using a computer or a smartphone to access government services. • Increased citizen satisfaction with state government resource accessibility by 2029. Baseline qualitative and quantitative data for measuring success will be gathered during the first year of plan implementation. Success measures include: • Annual customer satisfaction surveys of online services to be selected in partnership with other agencies and nonprofits. • Qualitative data derived from annual interviews and convenings with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders serving individuals with language barriers.

Objective 4 (OB4): Ensure that all Kentuckians are equipped to navigate the internet safely.	
Primary Targeted Covered Population	• Incarcerated individuals • Aging individuals
Key Actions	• Partner with organizations supporting justice-involved and aging individuals including Goodwill Industries of Kentucky to encourage pathways to teach digital skills and literacy, including a certificate of completion upon release to assist with re-entry. (OB4-S1) • Partner with the Department of Corrections, to explore expansion of digital exposure to the incarcerated populations. (OB4-S1) • Produce public service announcements (PSAs) around digital skills, internet safety, and the benefits of using the internet.. (OB4-S1) • Work with experts at the Kentucky Homeland Security's Fusion Center, libraries, and community partners to develop statewide cybersecurity resources. (OB4-S3)
Success Measures	• Number of justice-involved (formerly incarcerated) individuals who successfully complete training every quarter. • Increase in confidence in using the internet among justice-involved (formerly incarcerated) individuals tracked via residential surveys
Objective 5 (OB5): Improve digital literacy for all covered populations in Kentucky.	
Primary Targeted Covered Population	• Veterans • Aging individuals • Incarcerated individuals
Key Actions	• Work with digital equity stakeholders and trusted partners to develop the framework surrounding digital citizenship. (OB5-S1) • Leverage agencies within the Department of Workforce Development and community partners to incorporate digital equity into registered apprenticeships, re-entry, and other workforce talent pipelines (OB5-S2). • Create an interactive digital inclusion map managed by ELC/DWD to allow for research and longitudinal data opportunities so all Kentuckians can find training resources and support nearby. (OB5-S3)

Success Measures	• Increase in digital literacy skills assessed via the three residential surveys to be conducted in Years 2, 4 and 5 of the Digital Equity Plan. 30% of participants in the listening tour cited a lack of digital literacy skills as a barrier to using the internet. In focus groups with veterans and aging individuals, it was discovered that a lack of digital literacy skills was also a hindrance to internet use.
	• Increase in digital literacy training program opportunities across Kentucky as verified through the asset inventory map annually. It is expected this measure will result in a 3% increase annually for all covered populations. Current baseline data as established in the asset inventory is as follows:
	  • 19% of organizations provide digital literacy training services to veterans
	  • 24% provided the same services to older adults.
	• Attendance rates — track the number of participants who attended the training sessions provided by partners for the programs funded by the ELC/DWD Office of Systems Equity. Baseline data will be established after the first year of implementation.

Objective 6 (OB6): Help Kentuckians develop the digital skills necessary for work and life.	
Primary Targeted Covered Population	• Individuals who live in low-income households • Aging individuals • Incarcerated individuals • Veterans • Individuals with disabilities • Individuals with a language barrier • Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group • Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.
Key Actions	• Partner with the Department of Corrections, through initiatives like Jobs on Day One, Fast Forward, Stride, NOCTI, WIN, FuelEd, and Digital Literacy to increase the number of individuals participating in digital skills and literacy programs each year by 2% for formerly incarcerated individuals. (OB6-S3) • Offer all covered populations digital skills and literacy education platforms through Cabinet opportunities. (OB6-S1) • Collaborate with existing workforce programs and determine the digital skills needed to meet today's skill requirements. (OB6-S2) • Explore how to partner with WIOA, KTAP, and SNAP participants, wrap-around support to low-income individuals pursuing digital skills and address any policy issues to combat the benefits cliff. (OB6-S5) • Partner with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to promote telehealth services in rural areas. (OB6-S6)

Success Measures	• Increase Kentucky's labor force participation rate by 0.25% beginning in Year 3 for covered populations. ELC/DWD will rely on Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) to track this data. The baseline data for measuring success was established from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) that showed that Kentucky has the 8th lowest labor force participation rate among all states (59.5%).
	• Increased use of telehealth across Kentucky via the Cabinet for Health and Family Services or other publicly available data and improvement in health outcomes and health equity over the five-year period in rural areas. Baseline data will be established in the first year of the capacity grant period.
	• Successful deployment of digital skills and literacy education platforms through Cabinet opportunities in the first 24 months. This includes the new initiative for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, Jobs on Day One. Baseline data will be established after the launch of the program in the first year of capacity grant implementation.
	• Improvements in educational outcomes over the five-year grant period tracked by the Kentucky Department of Education. Kentucky's 2023 School Report Card indicated that less than half of student were performing at a proficient or distinguished level in reading in school:
	  • 44% in elementary school;
	  • 45% in middle school and
	  • 47% in high school.
	• Attendance rates — track the number of participants who attended the training sessions provided by partners for the programs funded by the ELC/DWD Office of Systems Equity. Baseline data will be establishing after the first 12 months of project launch will be tracked annually thereafter.
	• Expand Prison Education Programs (PEP) for incarcerated individuals from 4 to 10 institutions in accordance with the DOC plan.
	• Increase the number of GEDs earned by incarcerated individuals annually from 369 to 450 by 2026.

2 Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity

The goal of the Commonwealth of Kentucky's State Digital Equity Plan is to establish a roadmap that ensures everyone, regardless of their background or community, has access to the necessary technological resources to fully engage in our society, democracy, and economy.

In our current digital era, fast, reliable internet has become an important part of our daily lives. Whether it's for work, education, collaboration, or staying in touch with loved ones, having high-speed internet is crucial. It empowers us by providing easy access to a wealth of information, services, and opportunities online. High-speed internet has transformed how we communicate, learn, collaborate, work, and access important resources. It has become a catalyst for innovation, economic growth, and social progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns exposed a persistent and preexisting Digital Divide that adversely affected communities across the Commonwealth. It caused significant disruptions in various aspects of life and has increased the demand for high-speed internet connectivity and applications. Remote learning became the norm as schools had to adjust, businesses were forced to close or operate under limited capacity, and many people lost their jobs without the resources to adapt. This crisis also shed light on the inadequacies in certain communities, especially low income. The health care system struggled, and education systems were unprepared for many students who lacked the necessary connectivity for remote learning. The economy suffered, with few job opportunities for individuals, and small businesses struggled to stay afloat.

It is against this backdrop that a bipartisan U.S. Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in November 2021 that provided states with funding to develop State Digital Equity Plans. Like Kentucky, all states and territories are committed to developing and implementing State Digital Equity Plans to advance equal access for everyone - with particular emphasis on those experiencing the Digital Divide. Kentucky, located in the east-south-central region of the United States, is home to a diverse range of people that reflect its rich culture. With a population of around 4.5 million, the state is a blend of ethnicities with a vibrant mix of ethnicities and cultures, with racial and ethnic minorities including African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians representing 17.8%. The age range of Kentucky's population tells a story of a significant number of residents aged 60 or above (24.3% of the population). While there are no federally or state-recognized tribes in Kentucky, there are Native Americans residing in the state (0.3%).

While coal mining and agriculture were once the main industries, the state's economic narrative is expanding towards services, health care, and manufacturing. From the bustling cities of Louisville and Lexington to rural Appalachian communities, Kentucky's demographics offer a captivating story of tradition meeting change, making it a fascinating microcosm of American diversity and prime for digital equity advancement.

Covered Population	Total	Percentage
Aging Individuals (60+)	1,097,872	24.3%
Veterans	233,436	6.7%
Racial or Ethnic Minorities	803,191	17.8%
People with Disabilities	801,061	18.1%
Primarily Reside in Rural Area	1,860,980	41.3%
Incarcerated Persons	32,351	NA
Low-Income (150% of Poverty Threshold)	1,128,386	25.7%
Individuals with a Language Barrier	252,521	5.9%

Sources: One-Year Estimates from the 2022 American Community Survey; 2020 Decennial US Census Estimates; Vera Institute analysis of data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Kentucky Department of Corrections, 2022

ELC/DWD is leading the effort to shape the emerging and existing workforce to transform the lives of Kentuckians who have been left behind by the Digital Divide. ELC/DWD is thoughtfully engaging and collaborating with its over 500 partners and stakeholders including lived experience experts in shaping the vision, mission, objectives, strategies, and actions.

How to Use this Plan

This Plan represents the Commonwealth's resource and roadmap to enable all Kentuckians to work together to close the Digital Divide.

The Plan consists of four key elements for advancing digital equity in Kentucky:

- Establish clear and concise vision and mission statements for advancing digital equity in the Commonwealth (Section 2).
- Outline the current state of digital equity in the Commonwealth and its impact on covered populations (Section 3). This section explores existing digital assets, barriers to internet adoption, and existing opportunities and programs.
- Identify methods for involving Kentucky stakeholders in designing and carrying out the Commonwealth's Digital Equity Plan (Section 4).
- Outline strategies and actions for advancing fair access to digital resources in the Commonwealth in the next five years and beyond (Section 5).

As we work toward digital equity for all Kentuckians, this Plan should be used by all individuals and entities who share this vision. While the Plan outlines a strategy of closing barriers to broadband adoption.

2.1.1 Vision for Kentucky

By 2034, Kentucky will be a place where every resident, regardless of their background or location, has equal access to affordable high-speed internet, reliable devices, and comprehensive training to pursue economic and personal opportunities.

Kentucky's vision will lead to increased economic opportunity, educational outcomes, health outcomes, civil and social engagement, and efficient delivery of essential services for all Kentuckians.

2.1.2 Our Mission

Kentucky will work to remove barriers to digital adoption by creating opportunities through technology, affordable high-speed internet, and digital skills development for all people and businesses.

The goal of this five-year Digital Equity Plan is empowering communities, businesses, local governments, and state agencies to sustain the Commonwealth's digital equity efforts beyond this initial five-year period.

2.1.3 Objectives and Strategies

We have identified, in collaboration with lived experience experts and partner organizations, the following objectives and strategies for advancing digital equity through this five-year Digital Equity Plan. Section 5 of this Plan details the actions supporting these objectives and strategies.

Many of the objectives and strategies below will rely on leveraging the existing departmental and programmatic infrastructure of state, regional, and local institutions, such as Commonwealth Cabinets and Agencies, Area Development Districts, local governments, and Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs).

Objective 1 (OB1): Enhance broadband availability and affordability for covered populations.

Strategies:

1. Optimize broadband deployment in partnership with the OBD by sharing data regarding covered populations to inform the prioritization process and develop strategies. (OB1-S1)
2. Detect and alleviate obstacles and barriers preventing broadband expansion and adoption by facilities and communities that provide services to covered populations. (OB1-S2)
3. Build a publicly accessible catalog of state and national subsidies on the digital equity website. (OB1-S3)
4. Identify and increase participation rates in low-cost or affordable broadband programs such as the ACP in targeted communities that have lower participation rates than the national average. (OB1-S4)
5. Promote community anchor institutions with free Wi-Fi or hotspot loan programs as a stop-gap measure. (OB1-S5)
6. Leverage existing funds in partnership with the OBD. (OB1-S6)

Objective 2 (OB2): Ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians.

Strategies:

1. Create a sustainable device ecosystem in alignment with local digital equity plans, particularly in areas with low device ownership. (OB2–S1)
2. Identify and promote device refresh programs to deploy/sell low-cost refurbished devices to covered populations in collaboration with local governments. (OB2–S2)
3. Capitalize on funding to drive impact while balancing urgency, universality, and equity. (OB2–S3)

Objective 3 (OB3): Increase application accessibility and inclusivity to state and local government programs.

Strategies:

1. Conduct an accessibility study on critical state programs that are most frequently used by the covered populations. (OB3-S1)
2. Make it easier for covered populations to access government resources and programs online. (OB3-S2)
3. Identify and/or develop an assessment tool for local governments to improve citizens' overall experience in accessing government services online. (OB3-S3)
4. Improve civic and social engagement for covered populations on virtual platforms. (OB3-S4)
5. Enhance the delivery of other essential services, such as emergency management alert efforts for covered populations. (OB3-S5)

Objective 4 (OB4): Ensure that all Kentuckians are equipped to navigate the internet safely.

Strategies:

1. Identify existing and/or develop and deliver basic internet safety and fundamental online resources and post them on the digital equity website. (OB4-S1)
2. Create and distribute publicly accessible computer internet safety protocol document, as covered populations frequently utilize public computers and Wi-Fi. (OB4-S2)
3. Collaborate with the Kentucky Office of Cybersecurity to identify and/or develop and/or promote best practice resources on internet safety targeting covered populations in their communities. (OB4-S3)

Objective 5 (OB5): Improve digital literacy for all covered populations in Kentucky.

Strategies:

1. Define digital citizenship in the Commonwealth and roll out with key stakeholders. (OB5-S1)
2. Improve Kentuckians' digital literacy via private-public partnerships to promote or enhance existing programs. (OB5-S2)
3. Build an interactive digital inclusion map so all Kentuckians can find training resources and support near them. (OB5-S3)
4. Enhance the digital aptitude and self-assurance of covered populations in Kentucky by implementing an enhanced program through our collaborative partnership. (OB5-S4)

Objective 6 (OB6): Help Kentuckians develop the digital skills necessary for work and life.

Strategies:

1. Offer personal digital skills assessments and certifications in Kentucky to all who wish to achieve their goals or attain a basic digital skill level. (OB6-S1)
2. Incorporate digital skills training into existing education, training, and workforce development programs. (OB6-S2)
3. Expand covered populations' participation in and completion of online targeted-sector training in alignment with Kentucky's economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes. (OB6-S3)
4. Enhance educational outcomes of covered populations through engagement in online learning platforms along the education continuum from preschool to postsecondary (P-20). (OB6-S4)
5. Positively impact the outcome and equity gaps for covered populations. (OB6-S5)

6. Increase participation in telehealth services resulting in improved health outcomes of covered populations. (OB6-S6)

2.2 Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes

As the designated entity for state digital equity planning and capacity build, the ELC/DWD is well-suited to lead this effort due to the natural alignment across workforce development, education, and labor efforts. The Cabinet includes some key state government agencies for addressing issues of digital inequity such as the Kentucky Department of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education, the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, among others.

ELC/DWD collaborates with various stakeholders, most importantly, the covered populations themselves. Other stakeholders include businesses, industry associations, nonprofit networks, labor organizations and educational institutions. Together, ELC/DWD creates and delivers programs that equip individuals with the skills needed for the job market. Services comprise adult basic education, including civic education and English limited programming, integrated education and training programs, work-based learning, apprenticeship, rehabilitation and supportive services, veteran's services, vocational training, and other programs that help Kentuckians develop their skills. These programs enhance employment opportunities and economic growth across Kentucky.

This outline describes how the Kentucky Digital Equity Plan aligns with workforce development, educational outcomes, health outcomes, civic and social engagement, and delivery of essential services — as required in the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes

The ELC/DWD is utilizing its current infrastructure for workforce development, along with newly hired staff, to aid in state digital equity planning and capacity building. The ELC/DWD's Draft Strategic Plan 2023-2027 provides a vision that is designed to "foster opportunities for lifelong learning, training, and career services while protecting the well-being of Kentucky's workforce." That closely aligns with the State Digital Equity Plan, embracing technology as a mechanism for making Kentucky "a place where all individuals, businesses, and communities have full and equitable digital access to pursue economic and personal opportunities."

The Plan also provides goals and objectives that relate to technological advancement. For example, Goal 2 of the Cabinet's strategic Plan is: "Align education and workforce programs with labor market demands to connect job creators with qualified employees and prepare Kentuckians for productive employment."

Associated measurable objectives include expanding services and utilizing social media to communicate with stakeholders. This goal will benefit from a digital equity strategy that ensures that Kentuckians have the skills and tools to access information shared by the Cabinet.

In addition to vision alignment, the ELC/DWD oversees several programs that can be leveraged to advance digital literacy and workforce development. The ELC/DWD's Kentucky Career Center offers a full suite of services designed to help grow and manage the workforce so businesses run more efficiently and profitably. With over 100 locations across Kentucky, the Kentucky Career Center collaborates with various partner organizations, such as local Workforce Development Boards, Cabinet for Economic Development, Public Protection Cabinet, Department of Education, Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), and the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education to help Kentuckians with skills development.

The Kentucky Workforce Investment Board (KWIB) which is an employer-led board plays a crucial role in workforce development and aligning workforce needs with economic development policy and goals, as well as education goals in Kentucky. To address digital equity, KWIB can:

1. Promote Digital Inclusion: Encourage initiatives that provide affordable internet access, devices, and digital literacy training to underserved communities.
2. Offer Skills Development: Support programs that offer digital skills training and upskilling opportunities, especially for job seekers and workers in industries impacted by technological advancements.

3. Provide Business Support: Assist businesses in adopting digital technologies and implementing remote work solutions, which can create job opportunities and increase digital literacy.
4. Offer Data-Driven Decision-Making: Use data and analytics to identify regions or industries with the greatest digital disparities and tailor workforce development strategies accordingly.
5. Promote Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborate with private sector organizations to invest in digital infrastructure, offer training programs, and promote digital inclusion.
6. Provide Policy Advocacy: Advocate for policies that promote digital equity, such as funding for broadband expansion, digital literacy programs, and incentives for tech companies to invest in underserved areas.

By integrating digital equity considerations into its workforce development efforts, the KWIB can help ensure that all Kentuckians have access to the digital skills and opportunities needed for a 21st-century workforce. Some examples of services that are relevant to the State Digital Equity Plan include:

- **Work Ready Kentucky** - A community certification program that encourages counties to take a credible inventory of their current and future workforce, identify the gaps, and carry out strategies to achieve a more knowledgeable, trained workforce and set broadband standards. This program is available to county governments.
- **WIN Career Readiness System** - A suite of career readiness courses available at no cost to every adult in Kentucky. It includes a Digital Literacy Courseware, and the Digital Literacy Credential focuses on building technology skills needed for success across all careers.
- **Jobs on Day One** - Kentucky's Jobs on Day One addresses justice-involved reentry through a holistic employment development strategy. Workforce development complements the Justice and Public Safety Cabinet's (JSPC) Department of Corrections (DOC) structures. Within the program, Reentry Career Success Navigators access selected prisons and jails to initiate career services and plan, provide ongoing employment preparedness,support job and career placement, and stay engaged with individuals to ensure employment retention through adequate wrap around services. Job preparation and placement is done collectively and thoughtfully.
- **Registered Apprenticeship Programs** - This program is designed to assist businesses in enhancing their workforce by addressing the critical need to retain employees and seek qualified candidates for hard-to-fill positions. It accomplishes this by providing work-based training initiatives that combine on-the-job training with practical experience. With about 1,500 occupations for apprenticeship programs, this innovative program offers an alternative path to postsecondary education that drives Kentucky's growth and competitiveness by aligning with community college courses.
- **Work Based Learning** - This program helps companies cultivate and nurture talent through customized, employer-driven skill enhancement programs that are flexible and effective. Individuals also have the opportunity to engage with employers while improving their essential skills and demonstrating their employability. Some components of this program include mentorship, job shadowing, entrepreneurial education, internships, transitional jobs, cooperative education, and on-the-job training.

According to a report released by the National Skills Coalition in February 2023, 92% of jobs analyzed required digital skills, while only one-third of workers possess the foundational digital skills required to thrive in today's job market. This highlights the critical importance for the ELC/DWD to closely align workforce development activities with current programs and resources.

Digital equity is also closely linked to economic development strategic direction in several ways:

1. **Access to opportunities:** Digital equity ensures that all individuals have equal access to digital resources, such as technology and internet connectivity. This access opens a world of opportunities for individuals to engage in online education, entrepreneurship, remote work, and access to global markets. By bridging the Digital Divide, digital equity enables individuals to participate in the digital economy and take advantage of economic opportunities.
2. **Skills development:** Digital equity promotes the development of digital skills among individuals, which are increasingly in demand in the modern workforce. By providing equal access to digital skills training, digital equity helps individuals acquire the necessary competencies to thrive in the digital economy. These skills include digital literacy, coding, data analysis, online marketing, and more. With these skills, individuals can enhance their employability and contribute to economic growth.
3. **Entrepreneurship and innovation:** Digital equity fosters entrepreneurship and innovation by providing individuals with the tools and resources to start and grow their own businesses. With access to technology and digital skills, individuals can create online businesses, reach wider markets, and leverage digital platforms for marketing and sales. Digital equity empowers individuals to become entrepreneurs, driving economic development and job creation.
4. **Closing the Digital Divide:** Digital equity is crucial for closing the Digital Divide, which refers to the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. By bridging this divide, digital equity ensures that individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunities to participate in the digital economy. This inclusivity promotes economic development by tapping into the full potential of the population and preventing the marginalization of certain groups.
5. **Digital infrastructure investment:** Achieving digital equity often requires investments in digital infrastructure, such as broadband networks and public access points. These investments not only improve digital connectivity but also stimulate economic development. Robust digital infrastructure attracts businesses, encourages innovation, and supports the growth of industries that rely on digital technologies.

Recognizing that a company's workforce is its number one priority, Kentucky is taking steps to ensure that workers in the Commonwealth are equipped with superior training and skills needed to compete in the global economy. Kentucky has aligned resources to ensure companies and individuals receive the assistance they need to be successful. Below are a few examples of economic development programs supporting the digital skill development of Kentucky's workforce with ELC/DWD:

Bluegrass State Skills Corporation (BSSC) - Providing employers with more training funds to develop new and existing employees.

Providing Second Chances - Supporting job placement assistance to nonviolent offenders after they have completed their sentence to allow them to re-enter the workforce, thus lowering the state's rate of recidivism and saving taxpayer money.

Equipping Offenders with Trade Skills - Offering apprenticeship programs for adult and juvenile offenders while incarcerated to give them nationally recognized journeyman credentials in skilled trades upon their release.

The Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet has a long history of partnership with ELC. Within the Department of Corrections (DOC) programs like Jobs on Day One, WIN Career Readiness Courseware and Credentials, and Registered Apprenticeship with the Ironworkers and Painters Union are noteworthy examples of ongoing collaboration. The overarching goal is to teach marketable skills that can be used to find and retain employment for successful reentry. Every student is empowered and equipped with the knowledge, resources, skills and dispositions to pursue a successful future upon reentry to their community. Recognizing the shared interest to promote digital inclusion is a further opportunity to improve the lives of Kentuckians (OB6-S2). DOC makes available to the incarcerated population tablets, with secure

connectivity, whitelisted sites, monitored through cache boxes for education and entertainment. It is a DOC goal to upgrade those tablets to launch books and further expand their use. ELC/DWD will pursue opportunities for partnership with DOC during capacity and implementation (OB2-S3). DOC has a stated vision to provide "every offender with the tools necessary to succeed as a productive member of society", specifically identifying Digital Equity and Technological Infrastructure Improvement as a long-term goal to ensure work ready skills for successful reentry. In their 2024 State Planning Document the DOC highlights that in addition to expanding post-secondary Prison Education Program (PEP), they plan to expand & improve education digital equity and technological infrastructure across all facilities. Some of the proposed objectives include the expansion of GED Prep Software, College Partnerships, Computer Learning Labs, and a Virtual Reality Learning platform, in alignment with the State Digital Equity Plan. As funding opportunities arise, based upon capacity, this alignment will assist the DOC in fulfilling their mission of "preparing every offender through the advancement of academic achievement and work ready skills for successful reentry" and protecting the citizens of the Commonwealth (OB6-S3). Correctional education is a fundamental component of rehabilitative programming offered in juvenile justice confinement facilities, prisons, and many jails and detention centers. The DOC Division of Education offers career and technical education programs in adult institutions that are designed to teach students work-ready employment skills to meet job and industry demands. Some programs currently utilized by the DOC are as follows:

- **WIN Career Readiness, Courseware and Credentials** is a blended learning approach that includes classroom, project-based activities, and a self-paced, fully narrated online component that provides skills reviews and checks for understanding.
- **FuelEd** expands students' educational opportunities by leveraging the power of technology-enabled learning. The DOC offers FuelEd course work in FuelEd: Computer Literacy and FuelEd: A+ Computer Management.
- **Fast Forward** (KET) is a GED test prep program which offers on-demand courses in all four test areas: math, language arts, science, and social studies all accessed online.
- **National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI)** offers industry credentials and resources for career and technical education certification.
- **Digital Literacy** is an introductory course allowing students to become familiar with the basic principles and further the student's educational experiences in the digital age. Students become familiar with the basic principles of a personal computer, including the internal hardware, operating system, and software applications.
- **Stride Learning Solution** provides online and blended learning to solutions adapt to any size or type of need to providing new learning opportunities.

In summary, digital equity is a critical component of economic and workforce development as it enables individuals to access opportunities, develop digital skills, engage in entrepreneurship, close the Digital Divide, and drive innovation. By promoting digital equity societies can unlock the economic potential of our untapped talent.

Education goals, plans, and outcomes

The Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE) mission is to create broad partnerships and support so that every student is equipped for the future.

Additionally, the KDE has resources that are critical to advancing digital equity:

- United We Learn is a tool for better family communication and partnership overall. A key part of United We Learn's vision is embracing a culture of deep and authentic partnerships between schools, families, community members, and business leaders.
- For Kentucky staff and students, it's no longer a question of IF online learning experiences will arrive, but HOW they can be utilized to better prepare students for a digitally connected life and workforce. For this reason, the Kentucky Department of Education provides a nine-point Digital Citizenship paradigm to promote responsible technology usage in schools. One resource districts

utilize is The Digital Driver's License (DDL). It allows students and adults affiliated with the district, to interact with the concepts of digital citizenship through case studies and evaluations to certify their knowledge.

- Digital access at school and at home is essential for academic success. Students without access to technology in school or at home are less likely to engage in 21st-century learning skills. Access to reliable high-speed internet service is a precursor to the desired academic outcomes that are powered by digital tools and resources. Strategies such as 1:1 and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies are being adopted across Kentucky to help meet this need.

Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan effectively aligns with the Commonwealth's educational mission and strategic plan in several ways. First, the Plan prioritizes ensuring universal internet access for all students, regardless of their financial circumstances. This equitable access to the internet is paramount for student success, as it facilitates research, assignment completion, and communication with teachers and peers. In fact, a study conducted by Michigan State University to determine impact of poor or no home internet access on student performance and the associated costs to society provided the following data-driven insights and conclusions:

- The gap in digital skills between students with no home access or cell phone only and those with fast or slow home internet access is equivalent to the gap in digital skills between eighth and 11th grade students.
- 47% of students who have no home internet access or have cell phone only access to the internet plan to complete a postsecondary program. This compares with 60% of those with slower home internet access and 65% of those with fast home internet.
- Students with higher digital skills are more likely to plan to enter a career in a STEM- or STEAM-related profession.

Therefore, a strategy that is committed to universal access provides opportunities for student success. Additionally, this strategy will help to advance the KDE's strategic objective of improving student opportunities.

Second, the Plan places a strong emphasis on enhancing digital literacy among students, parents, and all Kentuckians. Digital literacy encompasses the ability to use technology effectively and responsibly. By bolstering digital literacy skills, students will be better equipped to utilize the internet as a valuable learning tool, thereby maximizing its educational benefits.

Third, the Plan addresses the critical objective of improving the accessibility of educational resources for students. With the internet serving as an expansive repository of information and learning materials, the Plan seeks to optimize access to these resources. This, in turn, empowers students to engage in more effective and comprehensive learning experiences. Additionally, the Plan helps to advance KDE's strategic objective of engaging "stakeholders in consultation, collaboration, and co-creation".

In addition to the KDE, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is the state's higher education coordinating agency committed to strengthening Kentucky's workforce, economy, and quality of life. The CPE does this by guiding the continuous improvement and efficient operation of a high-quality, diverse, and accessible system of postsecondary education. The Kentucky Student Success Collaborative (KYSSC), recently released a report, "Kentucky's Strategy and Recommendations for Addressing Student Basic Needs." The report outlines eight recommendations to assist college students with basic needs insecurity, which means a lack of affordable food, housing, and other necessities. Currently, about 1 in 3 Kentucky students are classified as low-income and are struggling with nonacademic barriers to success, like hunger or even homelessness. It reinforces the need to address digital equity in the education environment: "Just as technology is revolutionizing the way we work, it is also transforming teaching and learning. Digital classrooms, global online collaborations, and personalized learning software are only the beginning. Combined with face-to-face instruction, technology can accelerate and deepen learning in profound ways. But we cannot harness this powerful tool if educators lack training and resources, or if broadband access is not universally accessible and affordable."

Kentucky Educational Television (KET) has a mission of serving the public interest, KET enriches lives and builds stronger communities by educating, informing, inspiring, and connecting people of every age and circumstance through the power of public media. KET responds to the diverse needs and expectations of viewers, users and supporters through high quality programs, original productions, and valued services. KET ensures universal access, expands services on emerging platforms, and supports public safety. KET serves as a trusted community partner, unifier, and convener.

Workplace Essential Skills
As the data regarding adult education suggests, it's critical to support a national workforce that meets the needs of businesses, communities, families, and individuals. Now that adult education providers are increasingly undertaking the mission of workforce training integrated with literacy and basic skills instruction, KET's Workplace Essential Skills can serve as a useful tool.

The Workplace courses are organized into seven high demand career fields that teach contextualized and targeted language and math skills. Additionally, a soft skills course addresses professional behavior and communication, working with a team and critical thinking. Content in Workplace Essential Skills, delivered at grade levels 7-9, is accessible to a wide spectrum of adult learners and is aligned with National Career Readiness Certification (NCRC) standards, GED Assessment targets, and College and Career Readiness standards.

Teach Your Way with PBS Kids
Teach your way during the 2023-2024 school year with this timely collection of flexible PBS KIDS resources, aligned to themes and skills for PreK-2nd grade students. From exploring resources like video clips, interactive games, printables, self-paced professional learning opportunities, classroom posters and more, choose which you will integrate to support your young learners. Adults are encouraged to explore the resources and find meaningful ways to integrate media in creative and developmentally appropriate ways.

Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) is much more than colleges and programs: "we're a community where you'll find confidence, collaboration, compassion and success". The mission of KCTCS is to enhance the quality of life and economic vitality of the Commonwealth by serving as the primary provider of college and career readiness, transfer education, workforce education and employment training. Like most community college systems, KCTCS is committed to ensuring that students can attend college at a lower cost. Some key features around digital equity are as follows:

- The availability of online course work increases accessibility for nontraditional students offering these opportunities to populations previously unserved.
- KCTCS is committed to advancing digital literacy in Kentucky by requiring every student to demonstrate some digital literacy competency before receiving a diploma.
- KCTCS plays a critical role in advancing digital equity for students by providing digital tools such as laptops and hotspots to students from low-income households. For example, Elizabethtown Community and Technical College's library has a laptop lending program that serves low-income students with unmet technology needs.
- Work Ready Scholarships - Scholarships for training for high-paying, in-demand jobs are offered in Kentucky universities and colleges across the Commonwealth. This includes our targeted growth sector and high-demand occupations, many of which are tech jobs and or require digital skills. This program is available to Kentucky residents, high school graduates or those with a GED, and individuals with associate degrees or higher.

Overall, Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan constitutes a pivotal investment in the future of the state's education system. It positions Kentucky at the forefront of educational innovation and sets the stage for a more equitable and prosperous future for its citizens.

Health Outcomes
The Kentucky Department of Public Health (KDPH) Strategic Plan that was approved and adopted in January 2022 includes a focus on health equity. The Plan references the Robert Wood Johnson definition of health equity as a society where "everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible." Like the Digital Equity Plan, the Plan

recognizes that to effectively deliver public health services, the Department of Public Health would require "a comprehensive plan to address the challenges and barriers associated with populations at risk and social determinants of health."

As a result, health equity efforts are elevated and have become an overarching principle of strategic planning throughout KDPH. Assessing, providing, and delivering public health services throughout the Commonwealth requires an understanding of health equity and a comprehensive plan to address the challenges and barriers associated with populations at risk and social determinants of health. With a mission to improve the health and safety of people in Kentucky through prevention, promotion, and protection, KDPH will help attract and retain a competent and diverse workforce; cultivate a positive work environment and satisfied workforce; implement and maintain a culture of quality and customer satisfaction; and support evidence-based and promising public health practice and research.

To support health outcomes, Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan aligns with its health care initiatives, offering a multitude of benefits. The Plan aims to ensure universal access to high-speed internet for all Kentuckians. This is of paramount importance as it enables patients to tap into telehealth services. Regardless of residing in rural areas or facing challenges in reaching a doctor's office, individuals can still access vital care through telehealth. By bridging geographical barriers, the Plan ensures that Kentuckians can receive necessary medical assistance conveniently.

Digital equity, or the fair and equal access to digital technologies and the internet, plays a significant role in health outcomes. Here's how:

Access to Health Information: People with limited digital access may struggle to find reliable health information online, potentially leading to misinformation or delayed care.

Telemedicine: Digital equity affects access to telemedicine services, which became crucial for remote healthcare consultations, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Health Monitoring: Wearable devices and health apps are increasingly used for monitoring health conditions. Those without access to such technology may miss out on proactive health management.

Vaccination and Appointments: Online platforms often facilitate vaccine appointments and health care scheduling. Digital disparities can hinder timely access to vaccinations and medical care.

Mental Health Support: Many mental health services have moved online. Limited digital access can isolate individuals from crucial mental health support.

Health Literacy: Digital equity influences health literacy, as those with limited access may not develop the necessary digital skills to navigate health-related resources online.

Addressing digital equity gaps is vital to ensure that all individuals have an equal opportunity to access and benefit from digital health resources, ultimately contributing to improved health outcomes for everyone. Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan will actively work to close these divides and bring health access to each Kentuckian.

Additionally, the plan focuses on bolstering digital literacy among Kentuckians. Digital literacy encompasses the skill set needed to navigate technology effectively and responsibly, and that applies to telehealth just as it does to so many other facets of life. By enhancing digital literacy, individuals become more adept at utilizing the internet to access valuable health care information and resources. This empowers them to make informed decisions about their well-being and take an active role in managing their health.

Big Sandy Health Care (BSHC), a federally qualified health center in eastern Kentucky, and the Family Medicine Clinic of Danville, a small private practice in central Kentucky, are in the vanguard of health IT adoption and meaningful use of electronic health records (EHRs) to support patient and family engagement in rural areas. As rural health care providers, the two practices face common challenges, such as older patient populations with complex health conditions as well as lower rates of internet access and use compared with nonrural areas and a shortage of skilled health IT professionals.

- Diabetes rates in Kentucky are high and both practices serve many patients with this condition. In the counties served by BSHC, the percentage of adults living with diabetes ranges from 13% to 22%, compared with a national average of 8.7%. Most of the counties served by the Family Medicine Clinic of Danville also have higher rates of diabetes and the population is older than the national average.[12]
- Nearly 60% of Kentucky's population lives in rural areas or small cities where many households lack reliable Internet access.
- Based on estimates from the Computer and Internet Use Supplement from the Current Population Survey, Kentucky ranks 33rd out of all the states.
- Based on estimates from a statewide residential survey, 93.3% of households in rural Kentucky report internet usage.
- Many Kentuckians living in rural areas rely on small regional telecommunications companies for internet access that typically do not provide as broad of a network as national carriers.

A lack of skilled health IT professionals is another common challenge in rural areas. For example, the Family Medicine Clinic of Danville relies on expert consultants from outside the region for some of their IT needs.

Moreover, the Plan endeavors to augment the accessibility of health care resources for Kentuckians. The vast expanse of the internet serves as a comprehensive repository of health care-related information and tools. By improving accessibility to these resources, the Plan enables Kentuckians to find the care they require more efficiently. They can explore a wealth of health care options, enhancing their ability to make informed choices regarding their treatment and wellness.

When considering the broader impact, Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan emerges as a crucial investment in the future of the state's health care system. Its potential to improve health care outcomes for all Kentuckians is immense.

Civic and Social Engagement

Civic and social engagement is the active participation and cooperation between the government, citizens, business owners, nonprofits, and community leaders of Kentucky. This collaboration aims to address societal challenges and enhance the welfare of Kentuckians. Nowadays, civic and social engagement is facilitated through virtual platforms, which allow people to participate in social, cultural, political, and volunteer efforts from anywhere in the state. The State Digital Equity Plan will play a significant role in ensuring that all Kentuckians have access to digital tools and the skills to use them for civic and social engagement using high-speed internet. This means being able to register to vote, sign up to volunteer for a nearby food bank through their website, online affinity groups, and even hold a virtual town hall meeting to discuss community concerns.

The Kentucky Digital Equity Plan by ELC/DWD, through its measurable objectives aims to ensure that Kentuckians have access to broadband and the necessary skills to use the internet for civic and social engagement and are aware of their opportunities to do so. The Plan also seeks to engage local community leaders and other stakeholders to promote inclusivity in civic engagement activities. One of the implementation strategies (OB3-S4) and related actions in the plan directly addresses this matter. Additionally, the plan will make it easier for covered populations to access government resources (OB3-S1). When it comes to civic engagement, this may include promoting the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Online Voter Registration overseen by the Kentucky State Board of Elections as a tool for enhancing online civic and social engagement. In accordance with Help America Vote Act (HAVA), the state must ensure the accessibility of voting, registration, polling places, and voting equipment to all voters, including individuals with disabilities (including the blind and visually impaired) and voters with limited proficiency in the English language.

Delivery of Other Essential Services

ELC/DWD will foster collaboration with various other state agencies to bring awareness to essential services that are provided electronically and to ensure their accessibility to covered populations. While the definition of essential services can be expansive, this plan addresses emergency management and public safety as key essential services.

Kentucky Emergency Management aims to coordinate a system of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery to safeguard the lives, environment, and property of the people of Kentucky. It is crucial to ensure that all Kentuckians, particularly those left behind by the digital divide, are aware of and can use electronic resources that help to save lives during emergency situations. This is especially important given the numerous natural disasters, including tornadoes, flooding, and a pandemic, that Kentucky has experienced in the last five years, which has severely impacted the vulnerable populations of the state. To support the goal of emergency management, the State Digital Equity Plan includes the strategy "to enhance the delivery of other essential services, such as emergency management alert efforts for covered populations" (OB3-S5) that is included in the implementation of the plan.

Another key entity in disaster response is the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH). Located in the Education and Labor Cabinet, KCDHH provides referral and advocacy services, as well as an interpreter referral service for state agencies and public engagements to ensure that when information is disseminated in-person or electronically it is accessible for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. KCDHH also ensures that deaf and hard of hearing Kentuckians are alerted, informed, protected and empowered before, during and after an emergency or disaster. The Commission also provides emergency kits for the hard of hearing for use during emergencies. Our plan has specific strategies to address accessibility for people with disabilities and language barriers. This is addressed via OB3-S5 in the implementation section on page 55.

Aligning Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan with State Goals

The Better Kentucky Plan, spearheaded by Gov. Andy Beshear, seeks to advance economic development in the state after the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. To achieve this goal, bipartisan House Bill 320 and House Bill 382 were passed during the 2021 and 2022 legislative sessions to allocate federal funds toward initiatives such as constructing new schools, providing access to clean drinking water, and expanding broadband coverage. Most notably, the Better Kentucky Plan includes the Better Internet Plan, which is designed to help the state's economy and workforce by expanding access to high-speed internet. This marked a key recognition and prioritization of high-speed internet as essential for businesses to compete in the global economy, for students to learn and prepare for the workforce, and for health care providers to deliver quality care.

The plan is helping to expand access to broadband internet by investing in infrastructure, providing financial assistance to low-income households, and creating programs to train people in digital literacy. These efforts are already making a difference in the lives of Kentuckians. Businesses in areas with high-speed internet are more likely to create new jobs and invest in research and development. Students in areas with high-speed internet are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college.

The OBD intends to designate $10 million for workforce development and readiness efforts, in partnership with the ELC/DWD. These efforts are in direct support of deployment activities as they will ensure ISPs have an available, diverse, and highly skilled workforce. Recognizing the cost of that task, and the uncertainty of funds made available with the capacity and implementation phases of this work it is not clear what, if any, funds will be available to promote digital equity from the OBD. The relationship between the ELC/DWD and OBD provides potential funding opportunities from our Quality Equity, Strategy, and Training (QUEST) grant, future grants, and other discretionary funding sources (OB1-S6).

The Better Internet Plan is a work in process, but it has the potential to make a significant impact on Kentucky's economy and workforce. By expanding access to broadband internet, the Plan can help the state attract new businesses, create new jobs, and improve the quality of education and health care.

Coordinating with the Kentucky Office of Broadband Development

In 2022, Kentucky House Bill 315 established the OBD to act as the primary entity for coordinating and planning broadband services throughout the state. The OBD is charged with fulfilling the mission of statewide broadband expansion by enhancing broadband access for underserved and unserved communities. Its responsibilities include developing a comprehensive plan, managing grant applications, processes, and procedures, making formal grant awards, and overseeing the 22 sub-recipients of the grants. This includes grant agreements, monitoring, compliance, and federal reporting requirements. Ultimately, its function is to lead to increased

innovation and job opportunities and expand Kentucky's business markets. Additionally, the OBD aims to provide support to Kentucky's public safety systems, educational and health care institutions, governmental operations, and citizens. Currently, the roles held at the Office of Broadband include an Executive Director, a Federal Program specialist, a Grants Coordinator with more being sought, an ACC fellow and a GIS Development and support Specialist. The ELC/DWD is responsible for DE state planning, capacity building and implementation efforts.

The ELC and OBD initiated collaborative planning efforts for the development of both plans. While these initiatives have different objectives, they share the vision that all Kentuckians have access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet. The teams collaboratively planned, were engaged, and attended each of the 14-Stop Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour. Information gathered during that tour was used to shape each plan and is reflected therein. The Executive Director of the OBD serves on the DE State Core Team and participates in the regularly scheduled meetings. Frequent communication and collaboration occur between the members of each team including the development of goals, strategies, and activities. Joint efforts from ELC and OBD engaged internet service providers, area development districts and other shared key stakeholders in broadband and digital equity throughout the planning phase and will continue to do so throughout the capacity building and implementation phases. Each plan aligns goals and strategies, ensuring they both compliment and build upon one another.

Coordinating the Use of State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Funding and BEAD Funding

The State will coordinate its use of State Digital Equity Capacity Grant funding (estimated $22 million) and any funds received in connection with the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program. The following represent coordinated activities between ELC/DWD and OBD supporting capacity building and implementation goals, strategies, and activities:

- Continued collaboration with OBD to enhance broadband availability and affordability for covered populations (OB1). This collaboration is explicitly outlined in the State Digital Equity Plan objective one (see Section 5.1).
- ELC/DWD will support OBD with data, reports, Labor Market Information, covered population maps and information, and Bureau of Labor Statistics data.
- The ELC/DWD will target the Digital Equity capacity building funds in alignment with broadband GIS maps. For example, targeted capacity building investments in support of Digital Equity will be made where covered populations are present in alignment with the OBD priority areas and in areas where BEAD subgrants have been awarded.
- Assess regularly best practices and gaps with the OBD and refine DE investments to address findings. Capacity building and implementation strategies will be further coordinated to compliment OBD priorities.
- ELC/DWD will explore public/private partnerships informed by the Asset Inventory information when making its capacity building investment across the state in alignment with the BEAD 5-year plan.
- Leverage the existing relationships of the Kentucky Career Center (KCC) to support OBD with workforce deployment. KCC programs such as Registered Apprenticeship, Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship, community and technical colleges, and skills trade apprenticeship programs will ensure that Kentucky has the workforce needed for infrastructure deployment. ELC/DWD workforce deployment will align with the priorities of service set by the OBD to provide a ready workforce in areas where expansion occurs.
- Utilize existing funding opportunities such as the US Department of Labor (USDOL) $5 million Quality Equity, Strategy, and Training (QUEST) grant to expand the skilled workforce needs while promoting equitable access to high-quality jobs for historically disadvantaged communities (OB1-S6). The OBD intends to designate $10 million for workforce development and readiness efforts, in partnership with the DWD/ELC to support of deployment activities as they will ensure ISPs have an available, diverse, and highly skilled workforce to meet the demand.

- ELC will support OBD by ensuring labor compliance, standards, and protections of their subgrantees. Within the ELC, the Department of Workplace Standards resides, which includes the Division of Occupational Safety and Health Compliance, Wage and Hour, and the Division of Occupational Safety & Health Education &Training (KYSAFE).

The Commonwealth anticipates it will take the entirety of the $1.1 billion BEAD award, if not more, to meet the needs of the unserved and underserved in the state. Therefore only $10 million dollars has been dedicated for workforce deployment and no funds have been dedicated for Digital Equity capacity building and implementation in Kentucky's BEAD plan. Funding opportunities will be reassessed on an annual basis as the BEAD plan is executed and grants are awarded. Both 5-year plans explore other policy solutions and programs to support low-and no-cost internet subscriptions for eligible households. These and other initiatives will be reevaluated throughout the lifecycle of BEAD grants with the ELC/DWD's capacity building and implementation strategies. The ELC/DWD and the OBD's continued collaboration ensures that issues of internet access and adoption, and workforce needs are addressed concurrently with digital equity in mind as we prepare for capacity building and implementation. Additionally, ELC/DWD will further align with the OBD's priorities of universal deployment for the Commonwealth. Kentucky plans to weave Digital Equity capacity building funding and BEAD funding with other local, state and federal funds to achieve our goals.

Incorporation of Local, Municipal, and Regional Digital Equity Plans

Overcoming the Digital Divide in Kentucky requires a united effort from various community entities, both public and private. Kentucky recognizes the importance of ensuring municipal and Regional Digital Equity Plans are accounted for in the state's overall plan. This was part of the reason the ELC/DWD and the OBD held a series of town hall events in communities throughout the Commonwealth to gauge the digital needs of Kentuckians. This was a six-week, 14-stop listening tour that began on February 14, 2023, to obtain input from stakeholders and residents across the state. The OBD and ELC/DWD also hosted a June 2023 meeting with local government officials to provide an early look at the state's new broadband map and to engage with local officials about broadband needs, as well as existing programs and resources.

The ELC/DWD has also partnered with the Kentucky League of Cities and the Kentucky Association of Counties to gather digital equity plans. It became clear that cities and counties are doing work in the digital equity space. However, we identified only three local, municipal and/or regional plans: the City of Louisville's Plan, Simmons College NTIA Plan, and the SOAR Regional Digital Equity Plan. High level summaries of the plans can be found on page 35. It is important to note that there are no federally or state recognized Native American tribes in Kentucky, therefore there are no digital equity plans associated with tribes in the state.

The ELC/DWD successfully aligned the City of Louisville and SOAR's Plans with the Digital Equity Plan by involving representatives from both organizations in the Digital Equity Core Workgroup. These representatives have provided valuable insights and guidance in the development of the Digital Equity Plan, ensuring that it is in line with their respective goals and objectives. Although Simmons College's NTIA Plan was still in progress, the Historical Black University and College (HBCU) recently received the grant award through the NTIA's Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program. Simmons College, listed as a collaborator in section 4.1 of this plan, will play a vital role in advancing digital equity through the NTIA Pilot program.

The ELC/DWD is poised to play a pivotal role in fostering digital equity at the grassroots level by actively encouraging and supporting local communities in crafting their unique digital equity plans. Recognizing the diverse needs and challenges that different communities face, the ELC/DWD will engage in collaborative efforts, working closely with local leaders, educators, and residents to identify specific barriers to digital access and skills acquisition. Through quarterly meetings and annual summits, the ELC/DWD aims to empower communities to take ownership of their digital destiny. By tailoring initiatives to address the distinct socio-economic and cultural landscapes of each locality, the ELC/DWD ensures that digital equity is not a one-size-fits-all solution but rather a nuanced, community-driven endeavor. This approach not only amplifies the impact of digital inclusion efforts but

also fosters a sense of pride and ownership among community members, establishing a sustainable foundation for a digitally equitable future.

3 Current State of Digital Equity: Barriers and Assets

The ELC/DWD's path to success lay in an inclusive outreach strategy, featuring listening tours, focus groups, one-on-one meetings, and two robust public comment period, all centered around a thoughtful and complete plan. Initially, a dedicated **Digital Equity Core Workgroup**, composed of representatives of each covered population was identified including lived experts. The members recognized the importance of engaging the community and fostering a sense of ownership in the plan development. **Listening tours** were conducted across the state, visiting neighborhoods and community centers. These tours became a platform for candid conversations, each stop uncovering the region's unique perspectives, concerns, and vision for the future. **Focus groups** took the effort to a deeper level. Diverse groups of individuals, representing each covered population, gathered to discuss their specific experiences and barriers to internet adoption, digital equity and the effect on infrastructure, education, and economic development. Expert facilitators guided these discussions, ensuring that every voice resonated within the process. **One-on-one meetings** with key stakeholders were conducted as well. ELC/DWD representatives met with business leaders, educators, workforce professionals, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, labor organizations, internet service providers, and elected officials. These personal dialogues fostered connections, allowing for frank exchanges of ideas and concerns. The Digital Equity Core Workgroup also held a **two-day Strategic Planning Session** with the statewide trusted community partners to determine objectives, strategies, and the key actions for implementation. A **residential survey** and an **asset inventory instrument** were conducted. They were promoted on the state's digital equity website, as well as through trusted community partners and anchor institutions aimed at assessing the state of digital access and inclusion among its residents as well as determining what resources are currently available throughout the Commonwealth. The survey began with a clear purpose: to identify disparities in digital resources and to understand the specific needs and challenges faced by the community members. A team of volunteers, local leaders, and community organizations collaborated to ensure the success of this initiative. The **public comment periods**, promoted through multiple paths of outreach, were used to solicit feedback from interested parties. Leaders, citizens, and community stakeholders shared their thoughts, often providing constructive criticism and innovative suggestions. The comments received, responses and actions taken can be found in Apprendix X. As the plan evolved, it bore the fingerprints of the communities and covered populations it aimed to serve. The team carefully synthesized the wealth of input, adjusting, and refinements to the plan.

3.1 Asset Inventory

It is important to identify existing assets promoting digital equity that are available to Kentuckians. Any state digital equity plan should account for organizations and programs already doing this important work. The ELC/DWD created an online survey for organizations to complete, gathering data on organization type, types of digital inclusion services offered, and covered populations served. The ELC/DWD promoted the survey through email, state websites as well nonprofits and state organization representatives. Below are some highlights from the asset inventory:

- One hundred thirty-seven institutions responded to the ELC/DWD questionnaire, stating that they offer digital inclusion services and training.
- Most institutions offer training to help clients develop their digital workforce skills, teaching clients how to use the internet, and offering general digital literacy training.
- Two out of three institutions offer free Wi-Fi to the public, while more than three out of five provide career readiness assistance and public access to computers.
- Three digital equity plans have already been developed for different regions of Kentucky.
- The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a federal program that helps make internet service affordable through discounts for computing devices and monthly internet service costs for eligible households; as of

February 2024, Kentucky ranks fifth in the percentage of eligible households that subscribe to the program (50.1%). There are ongoing policy discussions at a federal level on whether to or how to extend the ACP beyond its current programmatic lifespan.

- For most Kentucky internet subscribers, the ability to go online impacts their health: 82% search for health information online, and 79% interact with health care providers.
- Internet service affects education in Kentucky, as 42% of Kentuckians report doing schoolwork or conducting research for school online, while 35% take online classes.
- Home internet service also plays a role in Kentucky's economy, with 42% reporting that they use the internet to search or apply for jobs, and 30% say they advertise or sell products online.
- The 5-year BEAD Action Plan collected data for these efforts that include both physical or "hard" assets important to the deployment of broadband networks as well as the "soft" assets – organizations, policies, and programs – that enable broadband access and adoption Some of the existing assets overlap, but data collection will continue during implementation of the BEAD and Digital Equity programs.

3.1.1 Digital Inclusion Assets by Covered Population

As of February 2024, more than 137 organizations have completed the survey and reported which covered populations they serve. Results can be viewed in Appendix II (page 75). Overall, the asset inventory showed that the covered populations were receiving some services from the reporting organizations.

The resulting data from the asset inventory have been incorporated as points on an interactive map available here: KY Map of Targeted Populations - Digital Equity

3.1.2 / 3.1.3 Existing Digital Equity Plans & Programs

The ELC/DWD took a proactive approach to gather information from different communities and organizations about their current digital equity plans. They used a variety of methods, including stakeholder meetings, public events (both in-person and virtual), email and social media outreach, to reach a wide audience. Despite these efforts, they were only able to find three distinct digital equity plans. This shows that community engagement and leadership are crucial in bridging the digital divide in the state.

Name of Organization	Digital Inclusion Plan/Program Name	Description
Louisville Metro Government	Louisville Digital Inclusion Plan	Louisville Metro's Office for Civic Innovation and Technology's digital inclusion plan provides the first steps toward eliminating the digital divide in Louisville. It assesses the current landscape of digital inclusion in Louisville, identifying gaps in the current capabilities and making recommendations based on benchmarks from around the country. Louisville Metro uses the Digital Inclusion Plan to pursue its larger strategic goals, such as jobs, education, and compassion. To better align with the State Digital Equity Plan, a representative from Louisville Metro Government actively participates in the Digital Equity Core Workgroup and has helped shape the Plan.
Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR)	The Digital Equity Action Plan for Eastern Kentucky	This plan helps Eastern Kentucky's rural towns and counties work toward achieving digital equity for everyone, despite the significant barriers that have long existed for the region. In 2023 SOAR opened its Office of Digital Literacy with the goal of helping residents with the following activities: • Use the internet to find remote jobs • Participate in local and community events • Take steps to improve their health through Telehealth • Access education and career training • Improve one's lifestyle by being able to "connect" with friends and family virtually. SOARS Action plan has the following goals: • Implementing and leveraging 100% high-speed at-home connectivity • Increasing device access & affordability • Shaping a device-first Eastern Kentucky Workforce • Improving education and healthcare outcomes All of SOAR's stated regional goals are reflected in the State Digital Equity Plan from a statewide perspective. To better align with the State Digital Equity Plan, SOAR is an active participant in the Digital Equity Core Workgroup and helped shape this plan by ensuring that SOAR's goals and objectives are addressed in it.
Simmons College of Kentucky	NTIA Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program Grant	Simmons College of Kentucky was awarded a $2.7 million grant in 2023 via the NTIA's Connecting Minority Communities program. The program is for expanding high-speed internet access and connectivity to eligible historically black colleges or universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges or universities, and minority-serving institutions (MSIs). Simmons College of Kentucky, Inc.'s project aims to build a digital teaching and learning center that will be a hub for providing comprehensive digital training and technology resources for Simmons' students and faculty. The project will also extend broadband and digital access to two neighboring low-income communities through partnerships with two community centers: The Family Life Center and the Louisville Central Community Center. A representative from Simmons College is participating in our statewide Digital Equity Summit and will continue to be engaged throughout the life of the State Plan. ELC/DWD will continue to track and promote activities related to the Connecting Minorities Pilot Program as Simmons College develops and implements the program.

Table 1.

ELC/DWD has taken several measures to ensure that the State Digital Equity Plan is in harmony with existing plans. The relevant stakeholders, as mentioned in the table above, were involved and engaged in the planning process since the beginning. They participated in monthly meetings, helped to collect data, brought awareness to ELC/DWD planning activities, and shared their information and experiences to address the digital divide. They played a crucial role in selecting and prioritizing the objectives, strategies, and actions of the plan to ensure alignment with their respective plans. Moreover, the plan includes an action aimed at promoting local planning on digital equity, given the absence of local government-driven equity plans (OB1-S2). ELC/DWD will also help promote SOAR, Louisville Metro Council and Simmons College Plans.

While only three plans were identified, the asset inventory illustrates that over 137 organizations currently provide digital inclusion services. This suggests that while communities and organizations may not have explicit digital equity plans, they are including digital equity elements in their organizational strategic planning and programming. The digital inclusion asset inventory illustrated the various digital literacy and skills training programs offered by various Kentucky organizations. The table below provides a breakdown of services currently offered and those that would be of interest if they had the resources currently offered and those that would be of interest if they had the resources:

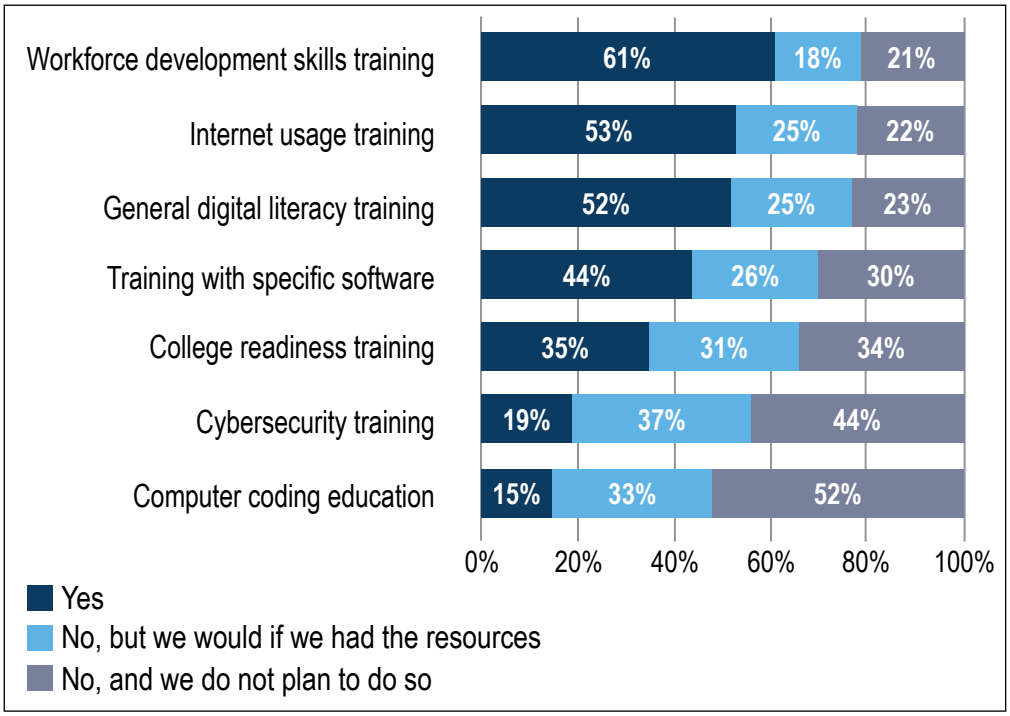


Figure 1. Digital Trainings Offered by Organizations in Kentucky

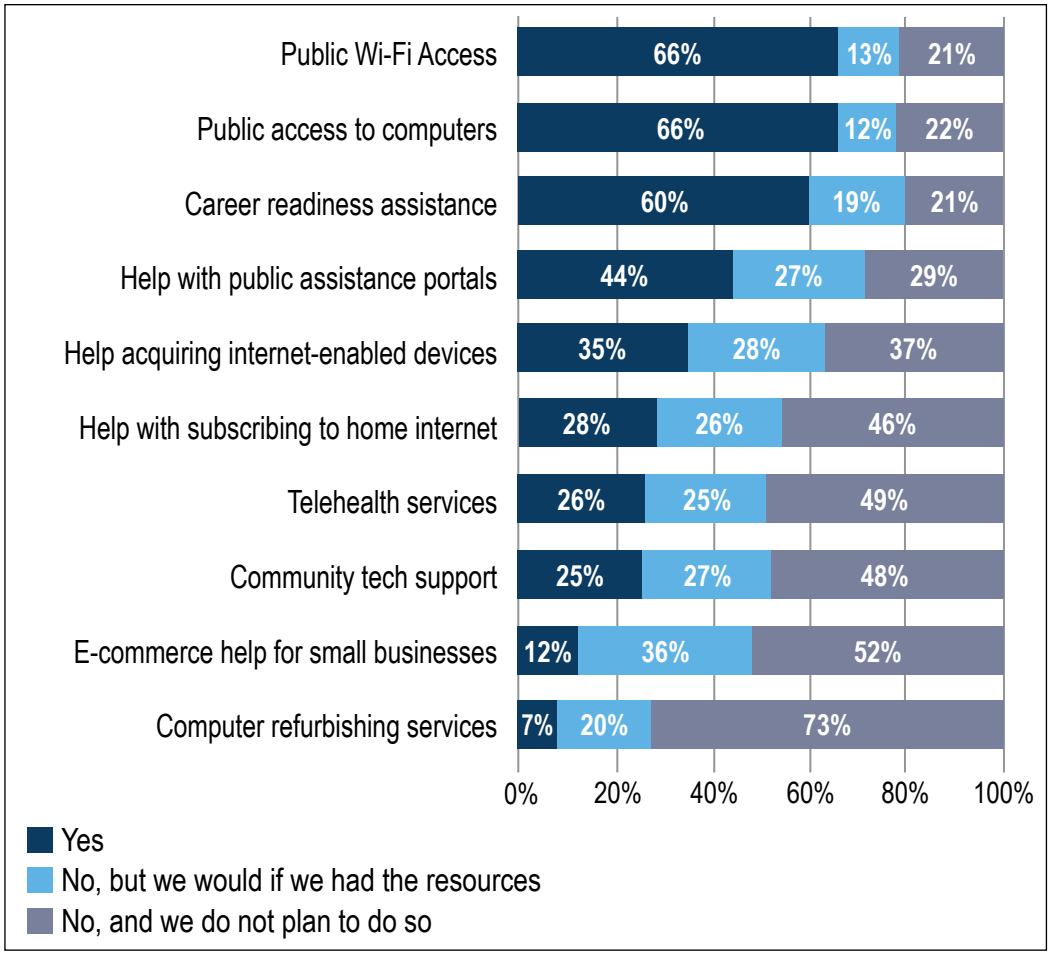


Figure 2. Digital Services Offered by Organizations in Kentucky

3.1.4 Broadband Adoption

The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) collects data about home internet subscriptions and internet-enabled computing devices in the house-hold.

Figure 3 illustrates the ACS 2017-2021 five-year estimates of the percentage of households in each county in Kentucky that subscribe to fixed home internet service.

These numbers do not include:

- Households with a cellular data plan but no other type of internet subscription
- Households with dial-up internet but no other internet service, and
- Households that rely on satellite internet service.

At the county level, the percentage of households that subscribe to fixed internet varies widely. Two counties — Boone (in Northern Kentucky) and Oldham (near Louisville) — have home internet adoption rates above 80%.

- Meanwhile, rural Robertson County has a fixed home internet adoption rate of 19.7% — much lower than the counties with the second and third lowest rates (Crittenden and Lee, with 33.8% and 34% respectively).
- Surprisingly, the map shows high connectivity in the hills of eastern Kentucky. Many of these counties have home internet adoption rates between 60% and 80%. This is a rural area with high poverty rates — attributes usually associated with lower home internet adoption rates.
- It's possible that because of the lack of access to reliable cellular internet (because of the mountainous terrain), households may choose to spend more on home internet.
- As expected, the areas of Eastern Kentucky with higher home internet adoption rates also have the lowest rates of households that rely solely on cellular internet.

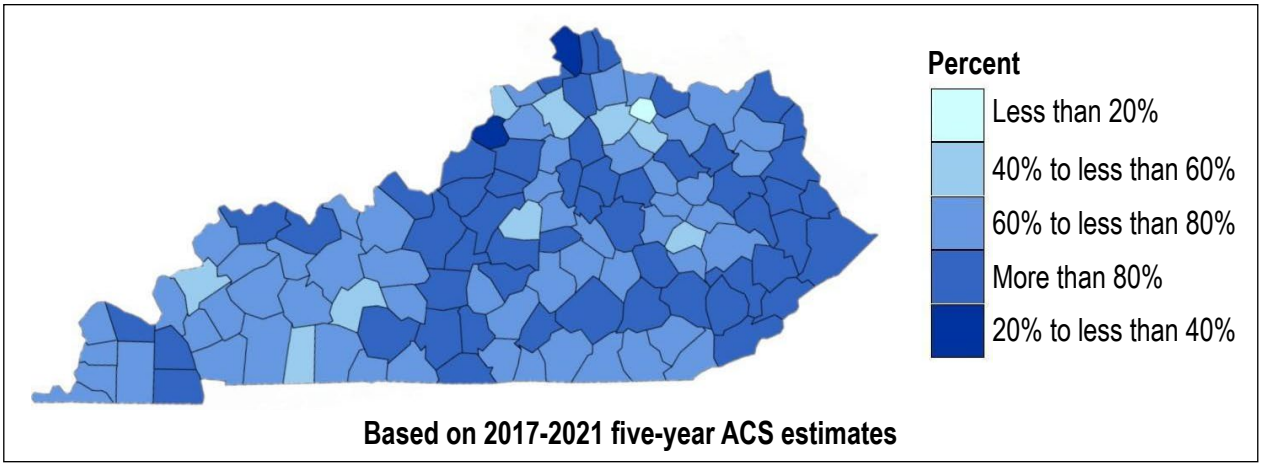


Figure 3. Fixed Internet Adoption by County

In 2023, the ELC/DWD administered a residential technology survey to Kentuckians which received 2,302 responses that shows some interesting results:

- 80% of Kentuckians subscribe to fixed home internet.
- Of those survey respondents who have fixed home internet, 73.6% report download speeds higher than 25 Mbps, the FCC definition of broadband. The average reported download speed is 307 Mbps.

What Are Kentuckians Using the Internet For?

- The U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 Current Population Survey included a computer and internet use supplement, which showed that many Kentucky households use the internet to telework, participate in virtual health care meetings, videoconference for work, and stay connected with their community.
- Kentucky's ELC/DWD residential technology survey showed that Kentucky adults go online for a variety of different activities (Figure 4).

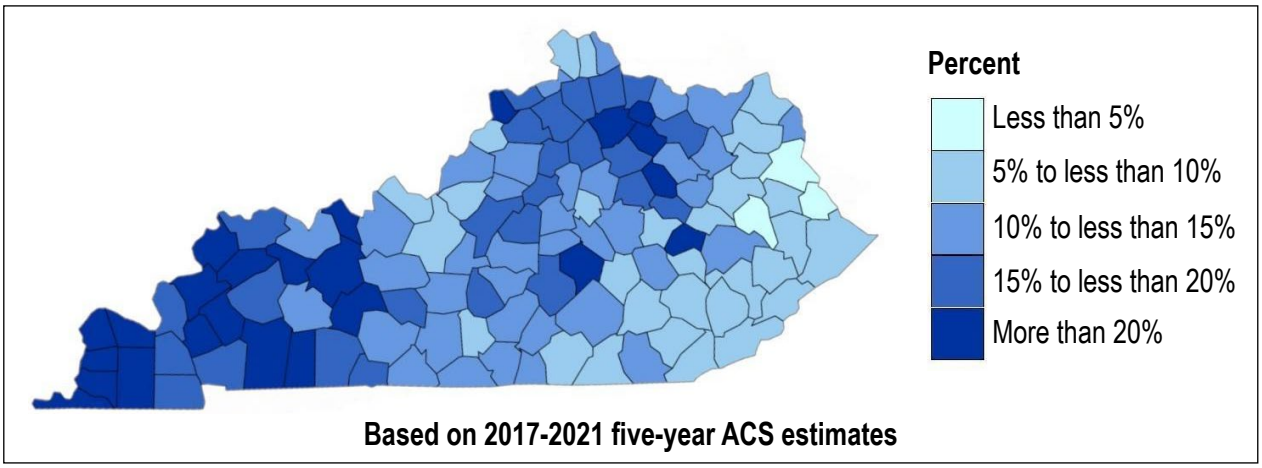


Figure 4. Households with a Cellular Data Plan as their Only Home Internet Source

	Aging Individuals	Veterans	Racial or Ethnic Minorities	Statewide
Use Internet for Video Conferencing	43.7%	41.9%	56.9%	56.3%
Use Internet for Teleworking	28.6%	33.3%	21.1%	33.9%
Use Internet for Job Classes & Online Training	6.3%	3.2%	22.4%	17.4%
Use Internet for Online Banking	55.6%	61.3%	63.8%	65.6%
Use Internet for Accessing Medical Records	32%	43.5%	44.1%	44.2%
Use Internet for Telemedicine Appointments	33.2%	40.3%	34.7%	41.5%

Table 2. Internet Use in Kentucky

Source: Current Population Survey, Computer and Internet Use Supplement, November 2021. Discernible data available only for the above listed populations.

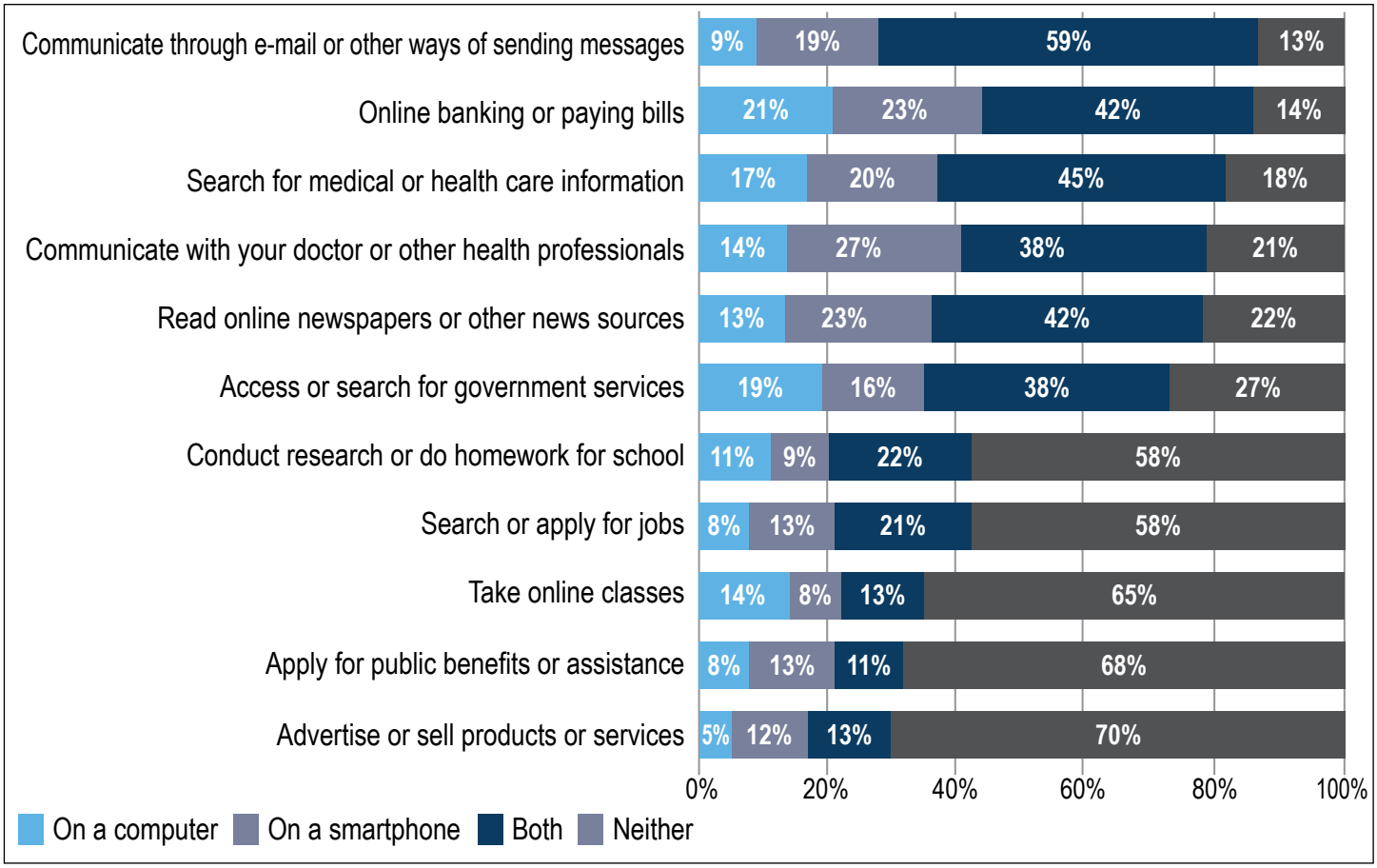


Figure 4. Online Activities Among Kentucky Households

- Focus group participants listed several different ways that they (and other members of their households) rely on their home internet service for work, school, and entertainment:

  "Everybody's on devices and TVs ... so you've got 8 to 9 devices going at the same time."

  "I use Facebook daily."

  "I like the internet for the ability to read comics online and use YouTube videos to read things. I get audiobooks free that way."

  "I like to use the internet for multiple things, like watching YouTube videos of how to cook certain dishes, budgeting, stuff like that."

  "I do my homework online — I go to the community college."

3.1.5 Broadband Affordability

Access vs. Affordability

- Broadband affordability serves as a significant barrier to home internet adoption. While many households may have access to broadband, not all are able to afford it.
- According to Kentuckians who attended listening tours across the state, 60% said that high costs were a barrier to subscribing to home internet.

How Expensive is Internet Service in Kentucky?

- Based on responses from the ELC/DWD residential technology survey, Kentucky residents pay an average of **$74.47** per month for their internet service.

As noted above, the cost of a broadband subscription is a barrier to broadband adoption in Kentucky. Availability issues may limit choice, forcing broadband adopters into sub-par internet service plans, or into higher-cost plans such as those offered by satellite broadband providers.

Several government programs exist to make home internet more affordable and reduce the gap between access and adoption rates, including:

- The ACP mentioned in Section 3.1, which was created by the federal government and managed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), provides a monthly discount toward internet subscriptions and a one-time discount toward an internet-enabled device for all eligible households.

- Lifeline is the other major federal program, also through the FCC, that lowers the monthly cost of phone or internet service for eligible households.
- Across the Commonwealth, 84 internet service providers participate in the ACP and/or Lifeline programs to help reduce the cost of home internet service. A list of those providers can be found in Appendix IV.

Table 3 below depicts the percentage of eligible households that subscribe to ACP, using eligibility numbers from Education Superhighway and enrollment numbers from USAC's ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker (with data as of September 25, 2023).

Table 3. Overall, Kentucky ranks fifth in the country in ACP participation.

Rank	State	Enrolled	Eligible	Percent
1	Puerto Rico	618,066	962,129	64.2%
2	District of Columbia	56,598	104,893	54.0%
3	Louisiana	487,396	904,157	53.9%
4	Ohio	1,025,139	1,984,218	51.7%
5	Kentucky	411,231	846,290	48.6%

To visualize ACP participation, Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of total households in each county that have enrolled in the program as of July 2023. Data on the number of total households per county comes from 2017-2021 five-year ACS estimates, while information on the number of households that participate in the program comes from USAC's ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker.

- Southeastern Kentucky has some of the highest ACP participation rates. Clay County stands tall above the others — 61% of total households subscribe to the ACP. Other counties with notably high participation rates include Bell County (57%), Owsley County (49%), and Knox County (48%).
- On the other hand, some counties have relatively low participation, including Oldham County (8%), Nelson County (10%), and Spencer County (10%). This may represent a need for focused outreach to identify if ACP or Lifeline eligible households in low-participation counties have enough information about these resources.
- The FCC's Affordable Broadband Outreach Grants Program awarded funding to two entities in the Commonwealth. In total, the Louisville Metro Housing Authority and Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) received $533,927 to help enroll Kentuckians in the ACP. At the time that this funding was awarded, it amounted to $1.02 for every non-enrolled eligible household.

How Many Kentuckians Own Devices?

Figure 6 depicts the percentage of households that do not own internet-enabled computing devices by county from the 2017-2021 five-year iteration of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS).

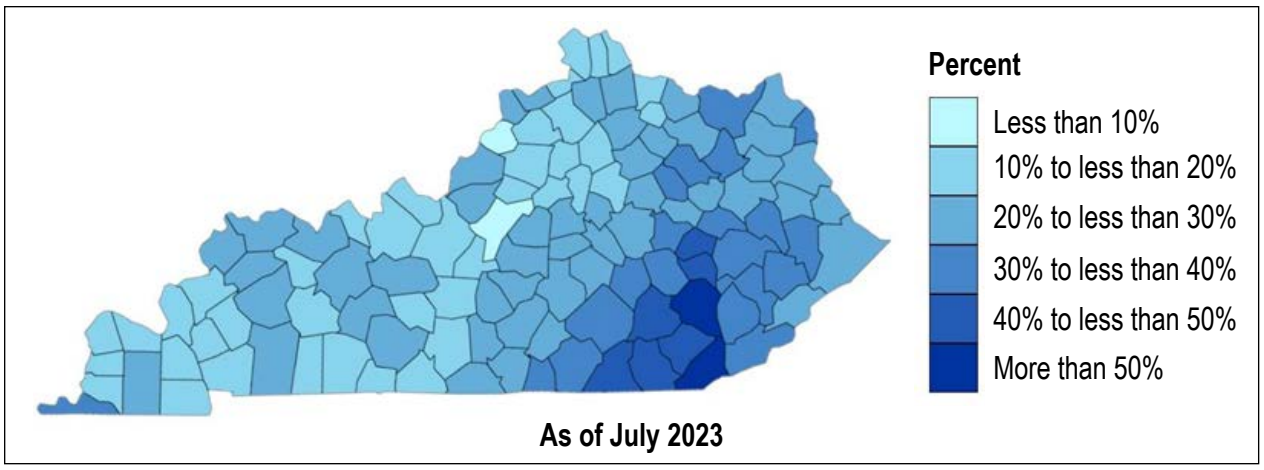


Figure 5. Households Participating in the ACP

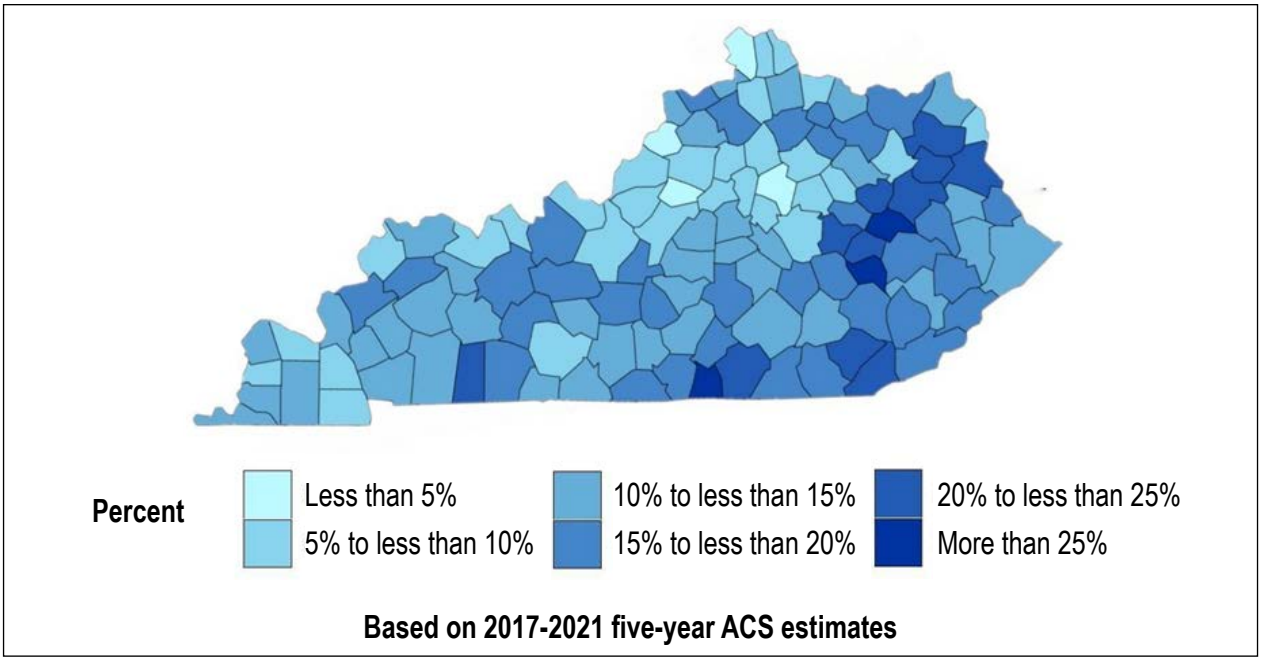


Figure 6. Percentage of Households that Do Not Own Internet-enabled Computing Devices by County.

- Without devices to access the internet, households cannot utilize the internet at home and must rely on computers at local libraries or other community-based organizations.
- While the ACS does not explain or ask why households do not have devices, the map above alludes to the importance of affordability. The hills of Eastern and Southeastern Kentucky, which face several economic challenges, have some of the highest rates of households without computing devices.
- In Owsley County, for example, 31% of households lack computing devices — the highest rate of any county in the state.
- Meanwhile, according to the ACS, the county has a median household income of $29,340, which is much lower than the state's median household income of $55,573.
- The county also has a much higher poverty rate (27.7%) than the statewide average (16.5%). Therefore, it wouldn't be unreasonable to conclude that residents struggle with affording devices.

3.2 Needs Assessment

Another vital step is to identify the primary barriers that prevent many Kentuckians (particularly covered populations) from adopting and using the internet. To identify these needs, the Commonwealth of Kentucky conducted a 14-Stop Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour, focus group discussions, and a survey of Kentucky households to determine what prevents Kentuckians from adopting home internet service. Among the findings from this effort:

- Nearly half of survey respondents (46.8%) who do not subscribe to home internet service cite the monthly cost of service as a barrier to home internet adoption, followed by a lack of available internet at their residence and a lack of a computing devices;
- Listening tour attendees agreed that cost or expense is the top reason why Kentucky households do not subscribe, followed by a lack of available service to the home;
- In addition to a lack of available, affordable service, there persists a digital skills gap that prevents many Kentuckians from fully utilizing the internet;
- More than 1 in 5 survey respondents (20.1%) who identify as a member of a covered population report that they do not have fixed internet service at home;
- The monthly cost of home internet service is the top barrier among respondents aged 60 or older, low-income households, respondents with disabilities, and rural households;
- Among racial and ethnic minorities and veterans, the lack of a computing device is the top barrier to fixed internet adoption; and

- For individuals who face language barriers, major concerns include a lack of services offered in their native language and a digital skills gap.

The Commonwealth of Kentucky has taken multiple steps to identify the challenges that prevent households from subscribing to home internet service and learning how to use applications needed to succeed at work and school.

Figure 7 illustrates the primary reasons why survey respondents did not subscribe to home internet service.

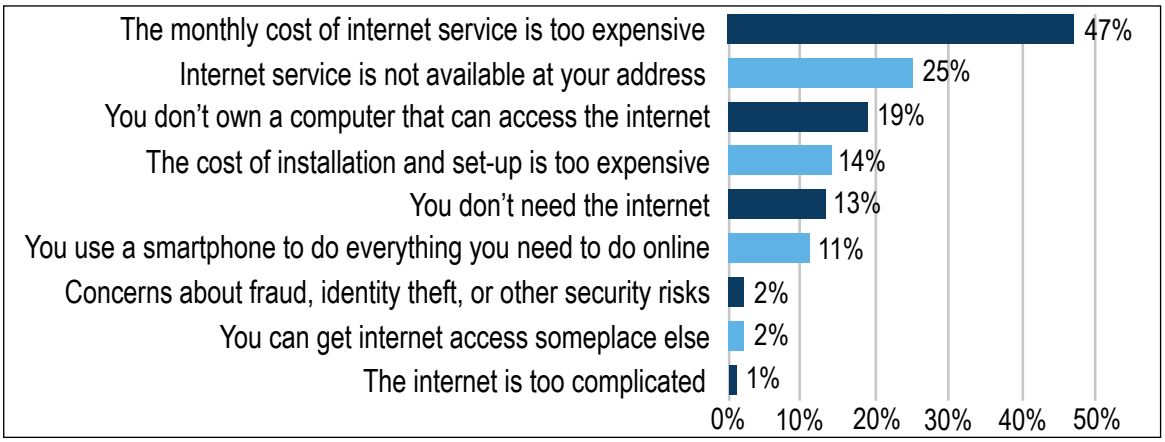


Figure 7. Barriers to Home Internet Adoption

Details about this survey methodology can be found in Appendix VI.

In addition to the residential survey, attendees of the Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour across Kentucky provided input on what they consider the top barriers to adoption facing their communities.

Figure 8 below shows the percentages of listening tour participants that indicated each reason is a barrier.

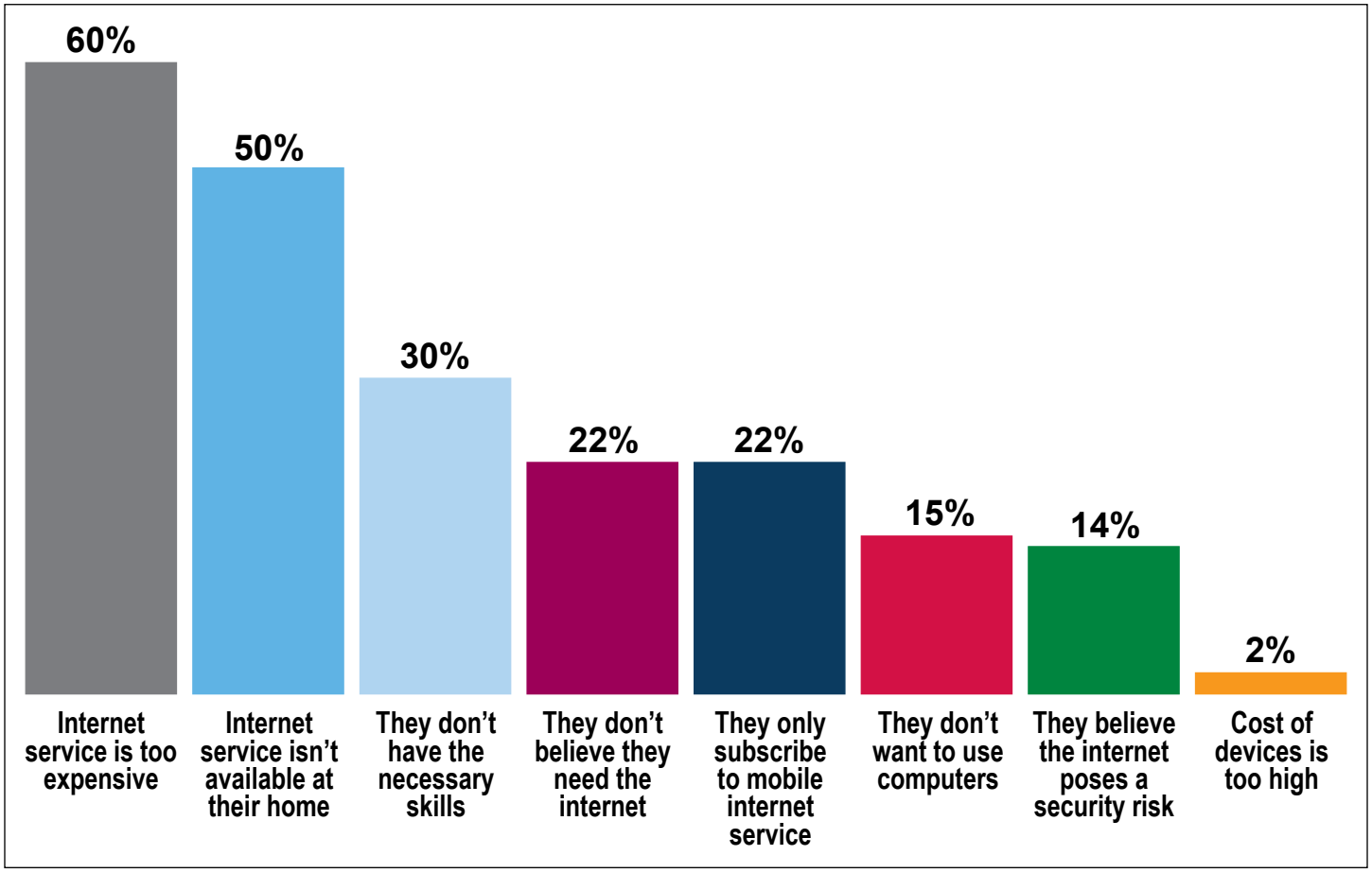


Figure 8. What Do You Believe Is the Biggest Barrier to Broadband Adoption in Your Community?

Top Three Barriers to Home Internet Adoption in Kentucky

Drawing from a series of interviews, listening tour events, focus groups and surveys, several challenges became apparent for households across Kentucky, as well as among covered populations. Through these efforts, the three key challenges the largest share of Kentuckians face as they try to get home internet service follow.

1. Availability of broadband service:.

- In several areas of the state (urban, suburban, but primarily in rural areas) the infrastructure needed to connect households to broadband service does not exist;
- Statewide, 25.3% of those without internet at home said that they do not subscribe to broadband because it is not available at their home; and
- Listening tour participants also cited availability as a primary concern; half (50%) said that a lack of available service is a reason why many households do not subscribe to home internet service.

Focus group quotes:

"They are laying the wires and cables, it's just that it's not available, it's not even being offered to you right now."

"It's just not here yet."

2. Affordablility of device and broadband services:

- Broadband and internet-compatible devices are often **not affordable**.
- The cost of broadband is cited by **46.8%** of people without home internet and by the majority (60%) of listening tour participants as a reason why households do not subscribe to home internet service.
  - **14.2%** of survey respondents also cited the cost of installation and setup as a barrier to subscription.
- The cost of home internet service was mentioned multiple times during focus group meetings:

  "It's just not affordable."

  "There's a lot of people that can't afford it."

  "I pay like $30, it's still expensive. I really think they need to either make it free for everybody, or at one price."

  "Being homeless, it's too expensive."

  "The affordability of having good quality internet is out of reach for a lot of houses."

- **18.9%** of survey respondents without home internet service cited their lack of a device as a barrier to adoption.
- **16%** of all respondents did not have a computer at home.
- **49.9%** of those without a computer cited the cost of devices as a barrier to obtaining one.
- Many Kentuckians need **digital skills training** to increase their comfort level with being online.

3. Need access to **digital skills training** to increase their comfort level with being online.

For many Kentucky residents, a lack of digital skills represents a barrier to adopting and using home broadband service. This is reflected in the number of residents who don't feel comfortable using a computer or going online; it also includes those who do not know how to avoid online threats such as malware, scams, or other digital security threats.

- Three out of 10 listening tour attendees (30%) cite a lack of digital literacy skills as a barrier to home broadband adoption, while others cite concerns about using computers altogether or going online due to security threats.
- Digital literacy came up regularly during focus group meetings as well, with many participants saying that they either did not know how to navigate the internet or they did not feel safe doing so:

  "There's no training."

  "Not everyone knows how to connect."

  "I don't know anything about the internet, never used it."

  "[It's a] matter of trust … so many scams and hackers."

  "Scams, you gotta watch out for scams. Hackers. Oh, Lord, you're getting hacked."

Listening to Kentuckians

These needs and gaps are further supported by the anecdotal responses and feedback received during the 14-Stop Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour that was conducted in Spring 2023. Public comments and discussion focused heavily on

obvious gaps in service across the Commonwealth, often focusing on specific or targeted areas where service is unavailable.

- The listening tour was a localized and targeted effort that took shape as a 14-stop tour that was geographically diverse and provided opportunities for Kentucky's rural and urban populations to discuss the needs, concerns, and hopes for high-speed internet and digital equity in an open and public manner.
- Individuals or organizations representing each covered population group participated in the listening tour. Some covered populations were represented by a larger share of listening tour attendees (either as residents or represented by organizations that serve them). Nearly three out of five listening tour attendees (59%) lived in rural areas and/or worked for organizations who serve rural residents; similarly, nearly two out of five attendees (39%) were residents of low-income households or worked for an organization serving that population. Incarcerated individuals had the fewest representatives attending the listening tour, with 17% of listening tour attendees representing organizations who serve this covered population.
- Participants were led through a discussion that included a summary and timeline of the BEAD and Digital Equity programs, as well as an hour-and-a-half facilitated discussion related to high-speed internet, needs, barriers, digital inclusion, and how it impacts their community (city, county, region, etc.). Digital meeting facilitation tools were utilized to ask questions and further help in the facilitation of the meeting, allowing participants to interact both verbally and in a quantitative fashion.
- Listening tour attendees echoed concerns about digital literacy tools in their open-ended feedback:

  "Many folks don't take advantage of [digital inclusion] resources due to ignorance or sheer apathy."

  "People aren't going to utilize these tools unless [they are] easily digestible."

Covered Populations

Q: What are covered populations?

A: Covered populations have much in common with demographic groups collectively and colloquially referred to as "at-risk populations" or "vulnerable populations," including in broadband and digital inclusion programs from prior years. However, the term is defined in the Digital Equity Act of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, as:

- individuals who live in low-income households;
- aging individuals;
- incarcerated individuals;
- veterans;
- individuals with disabilities;
- individuals with a language barrier;
- individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and
- individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.

Source: Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, 2021

In total, 3.7 million of Kentucky's residents meet the criteria necessary to be considered members of one of these covered populations. Table 4 below illustrates the size of each covered population in the state.

Table 4: Covered Populations Residing in Kentucky

Covered Population	Total	Percentage
Aging Individuals (60+)	1,097,872	24.3%
Veterans	233,436	6.7%
Racial or Ethnic Minorities	803,191	17.8%
People with Disabilities	801,061	18.1%
Primarily Reside in Rural Area	1,860,980	41.3%
Incarcerated Persons	32,351	NA
Low-Income (150% of Poverty Threshold)	1,128,386	25.7%
Individuals with a Language Barrier	252,521	5.9%

Sources: One-Year Estimates from the 2022 American Community Survey; 2020 Decennial US Census Estimates; Vera Institute analysis of data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Kentucky Department of Corrections, 2022

To explore a map of where covered populations in Kentucky, follow this link:

digitalequity.ky.gov/Pages/KY-Map-of-Targeted-Populations.aspx

Summary of Needs Assessment of Covered Population

Based on available data, 47% of all members of covered populations without broadband struggle with affording access, and 25% do not have internet available at their homes. ELC/DWD's digital inclusion asset inventory established that there are 137 organizations and institutions that offer public resources and services that serve covered populations across the state. Of those, 52% offer general digital literacy training, and 22% offer cybersecurity training. As for devices and their affordability, 84% of all members of covered populations in Kentucky have at least one device that can access the internet; and of those without a computing device, 50% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Aging Individuals (60+)

Relying on available data, 52% of aging individuals without broadband struggle with affording access, while 31% do not have internet available at their homes. The asset inventory showed that 39% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve aging individuals across the state. Of those, 24% offer general digital literacy training, and 11% offer cybersecurity training. Roughly 92% of aging individuals have at least one device that can access the internet; of those without a computing device, 31% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Low-Income Households (at or Below 150% of Federal Poverty Threshold)

Based on available data, 47% of low-income persons without broadband struggle with affording access, while 19% do not have internet available at their homes. The asset inventory showed that 53% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve low-income persons across the state. Of those, 36% offer general digital literacy training, and 13% offer cybersecurity training. Just over 63% of low-income individuals have at least one device that can access the internet; of those without a computing device, 56% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Racial or Ethnic Minorities

Relying on available data, 29% of racial or ethnic minorities without broadband struggle with affording access, while 12% do not have internet available at their homes. The asset inventory showed that 28% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve racial and ethnic minorities across the state. Of those, 18% offer general digital literacy training, and 8% offer cybersecurity training. Roughly 72% of racial or ethnic minorities own at least one device that can access the internet; of those without a computing device, 57% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Rural Kentuckians

Based on available data, 44% of people residing in a rural area without broadband struggle with affording access, while 34% do not have internet available at their homes. The asset inventory showed that 44% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve rural residents across the state. Of those, 27% offer general digital literacy training, and 12% offer cybersecurity training. Roughly 85% of Kentuckians who reside in a rural area own at least one device that can access the internet; of those without a computing device, 54% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Veterans

Drawing from available data, 40% of veterans without broadband struggle with affording access, while 34% do not have internet available at their homes. The asset inventory showed that 31% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve veterans across the state. Of those, 19% offer general digital literacy training, and 10% offer cybersecurity training. Roughly 92% of veterans own at least one device that can access the internet; of those without a computing device, 39% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Persons with a Language Barrier

Based on available data, 50% of individuals with a language barrier without broadband struggle with affording access; none of these respondents indicated that they cannot receive internet at their homes. The asset inventory showed that 23% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve individuals with a language barrier across the state. Of those, 23% offer general digital literacy training, and 8% offer cybersecurity training. Roughly 79% of individuals

with a language barrier have at least one device that can access the internet; of those without a computing device, 67% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Persons with Disabilities

Relying on available data, 50% of persons with disabilities without broadband struggle with affording access, while 17% do not have internet available at their homes. The asset inventory showed that 42% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve persons with disabilities across the state. Of those, 21% offer general digital literacy training, and 10% offer cybersecurity training. About 79% of persons with disabilities have at least one device that can access the internet; of those without a computing device, 53% struggle with the ability to afford a device.

Justice Involved Persons

The asset inventory showed that 22% of organizations and institutions offer public resources and services that serve justice involved populations across the state. Of those, 13% offer general digital literacy training, and 6% offer cybersecurity training. Unfortunately, no available data exists for other important metrics, including broadband affordability and access, and the availability or affordability of consumer devices.

3.2.1 Barriers for Covered Populations, Adoption, and Affordability

Broadband adoption rates among individuals who identify as covered population members tend to be lower overall than the statewide average (Figure 9).

Among all covered populations, 80.1% of households report that they subscribe to fixed home internet service compared to 80% statewide. Among specific groups of covered populations, individuals with a language barrier, racial and ethnic minorities, and respondents with disabilities had the lowest internet adoption rates, reporting 77% adoption rates, trailing the state average by three percentage points.

In addition to a residential survey, the ELC/DWD worked with community partners to host a series of focus groups across the state to learn more about these covered populations. From May 25 to August 22, 2023, 17 focus groups were conducted in 11 cities across the Commonwealth reaching a total of 191 participants. While all covered populations were represented, some conversations better illustrated the unique challenges these populations face than others.

Insights from each covered population derived from the residential survey, 14-Stop Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour and the focus groups, are found below.

Aging Individuals (60+)

To ensure that broadband is available to individuals who identify as members of covered populations, it is first necessary to determine where those populations live. The Commonwealth of Kentucky, through the Kentucky Center for Statistics, developed maps showing where covered populations reside, and which counties have the largest percentages of these individuals. The map below focuses specifically on aging individuals.

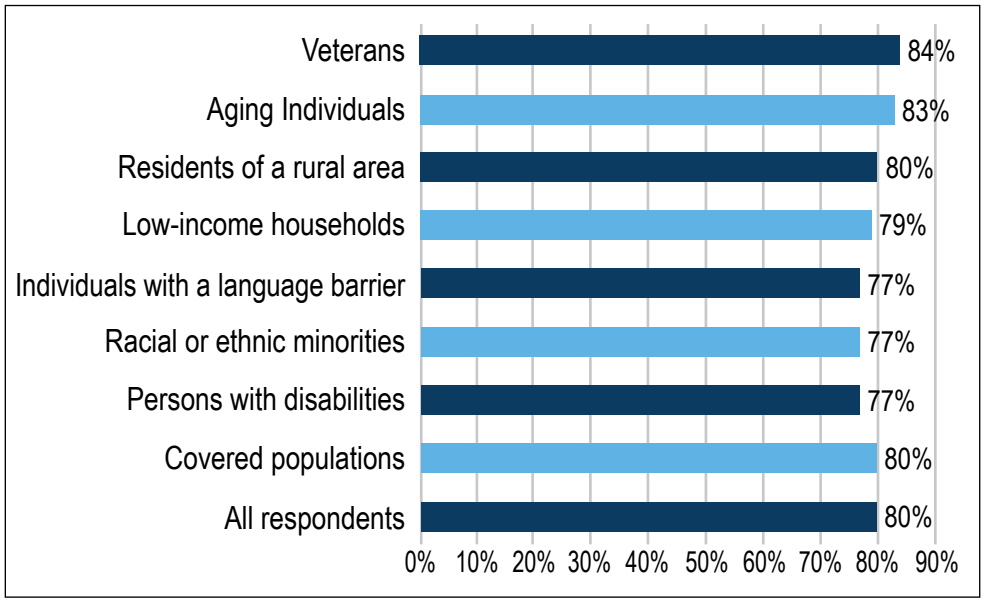
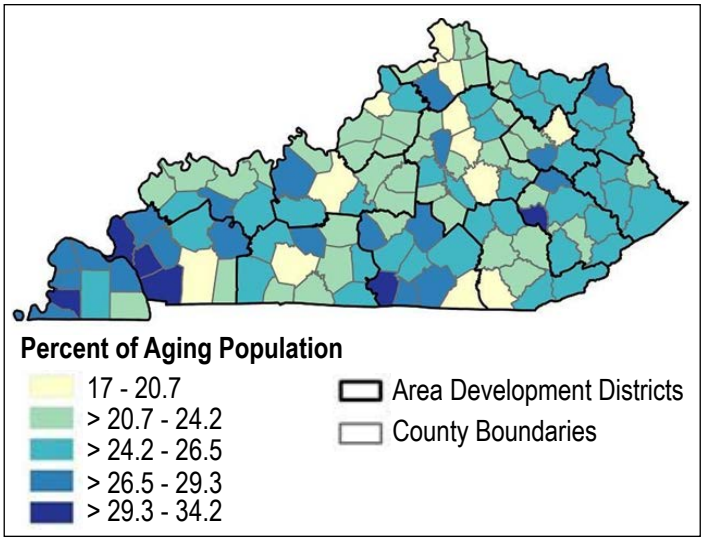


Figure 9. Broadband Adoption Rates Among Covered Populations



The ELC/DWD also partnered with Goodwill Industries of Kentucky and the United Way of Kentucky to conduct focus groups of aging individuals in the state. Across five cities, these discussions included 89 participants who provided context about the unique challenges that this population faces related to broadband. Aging individuals also participated in other focus group discussions not specific to the covered population.

Table 4 below summarizes key takeaways gathered from these focus group discussions.

Finding	Quote
Aging individuals can struggle with using internet-connected technologies due to a lack of understanding.	"And signing up for benefits in general, really, there's a lot of people nearing retirement age that just, technology grew faster than they understood it, and just signing up for bank statements online is confusing."
Given a lack of resources to train this generation, many feel that they must rely on family members (if available) to properly understand the internet and associated technologies.	"If I have an issue, I take my phone or my tablet to my children. Or my 5-year-old grandson is really good at that, too." "I give [my phone] to my grandkids because they can do anything they want to do on it."
Because of their lack of familiarity with internet-connected devices, information retention can be a problem even after things have been properly explained.	"I mean, I've just passed the beginning stages of it, but I'm old, and I've already forgotten half of it."
Lacking digital skills makes this population more vulnerable to cybersecurity threats, as scams can be hard to identify with limited information.	"Not to make a generalization, but a lot of the older people don't really know as much about the internet because they didn't grow up with it. Trying to get them more aware about how the hackers can get in through your email. They'll literally change one character, or one letter of an email, and it looks like it's an email from Apple."
To some degree, these problems reinforce each other — aging individuals without digital skills may be afraid to use the internet because they fear being scammed, which makes it difficult to attain digital skills on their own.	"A lot of the older people in this area have the attitude [that] they won't click or do nothing. My dad won't go explore anything. He's too afraid because he's heard all the stories. He doesn't go look up stuff. He's terrified of being scammed."

Figure 10 below highlights why aging individuals without home internet service do not subscribe. The primary barrier facing this population is that the monthly cost of service is too expensive.

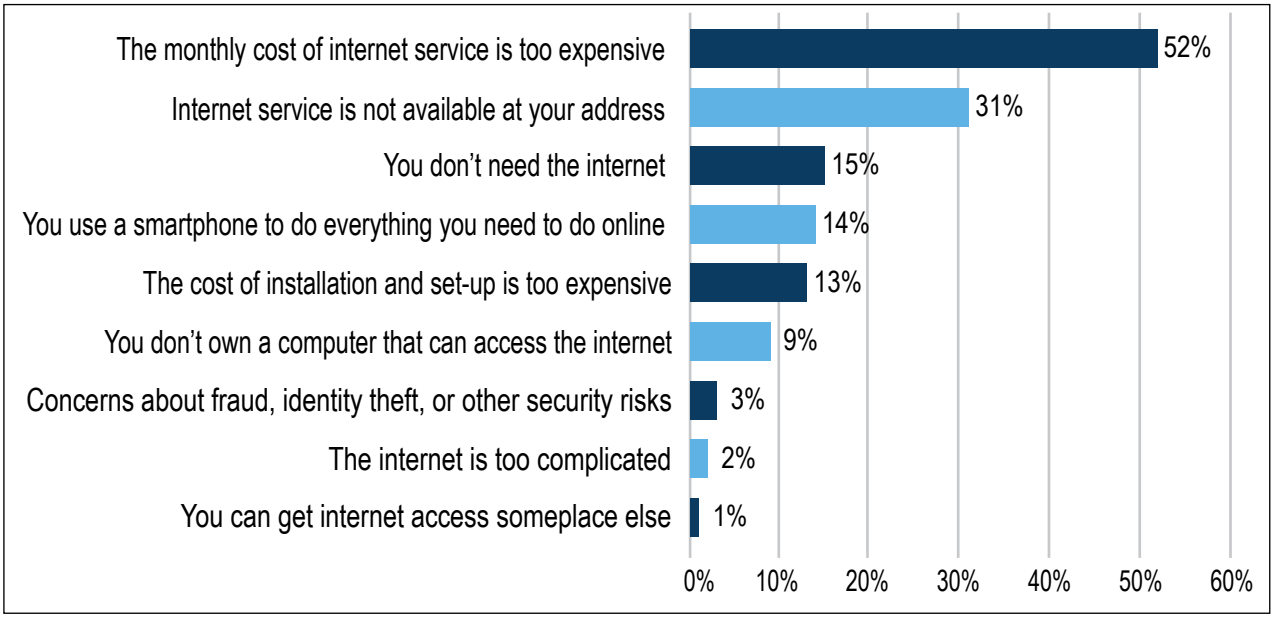


Figure 10. Why Aging Individuals Do Not Subscribe to Home Internet Service

Low-Income Households (at or Below 150% of Federal Poverty Threshold)

The map below shows the percentage of low-income households in each of Kentucky's counties.

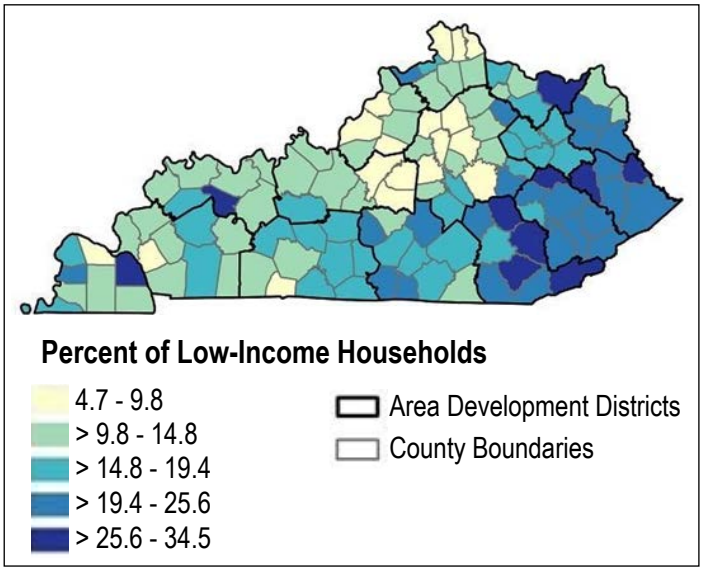


Figure 11 below shows why survey respondents without home internet service do not subscribe. The primary barrier facing low-income households is that the monthly cost of service is too expensive.

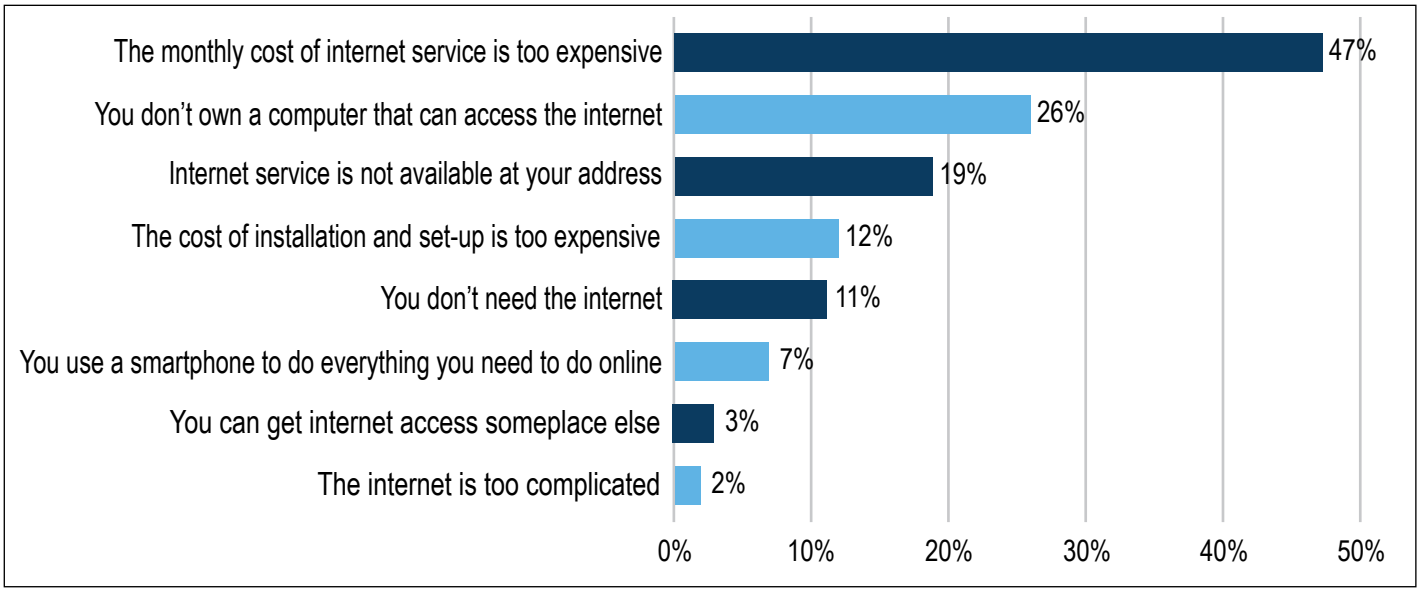


Figure 11. Why Low-Income Individuals Do Not Subscribe to Home Internet Service

The ELC/DWD also partnered with the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, the United Way of Kentucky, and Red Bird Missions to conduct a series of focus groups in the state. These discussions, across four cities with 75 participants, highlighted the unique challenges that low-income households face related to broadband. Key takeaways can be found in Table 5 below.

Finding	Quote
For some individuals living in low-income households, the question of affordability comes down to priorities — a household may have the ability to pay for home internet service, but other bills take priority.	"They can afford the $40 a month, but they have to use that $40 … Literally, all they have is money for rent. They can't afford anything outside of that."
While they may need to spend that money on necessities like food, the lack of internet inhibits their ability to participate in the workforce.	"Not a luxury. Essential. Certain populations [have] basic needs like food, but not internet. Could work from home but no internet. Applying for jobs — do you have a computer, internet?"
Programs like the ACP do help with affordability; however, some commented that they do not fully address cost concerns, and information about these programs is not always transparent.	"Well, I was walking, and saw a tent that said if you have food stamps, medical card, or something like that, you're eligible to get a free phone, free service, and that's how I learned about that. But then when I had got in my own place they said, 'Well, you can do the ACP.' And I did the ACP, not knowing that if I did the ACP on my Wi-Fi, my phone would be shut off. Can't get both."
While programs like the ACP exist to provide free or reduced-cost devices to low-income households, maintaining those devices can be expensive, which creates a barrier to future connectivity.	"[Devices are] kind of crappy technology and really expensive to get them fixed, too. I called up and I was gonna fix my screen. They wanted like $120 to fix this. That's really expensive."

Table 5: Unique Challenges for Low-income Households

Racial or Ethnic Minorities

The map below depicts the percentage of the population that identifies as a racial or ethnic minority in each of Kentucky's counties.

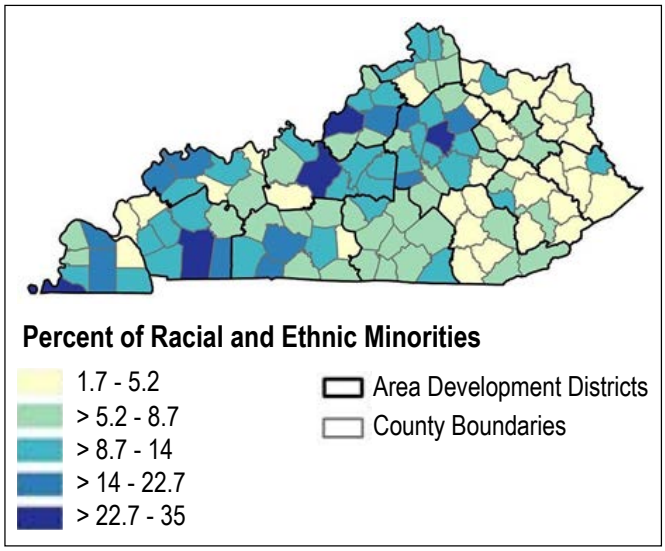


Figure 12 below illustrates why members of racial or ethnic minority groups without home internet service do not subscribe. The primary barrier to subscription is they don't own computers that can access the internet.

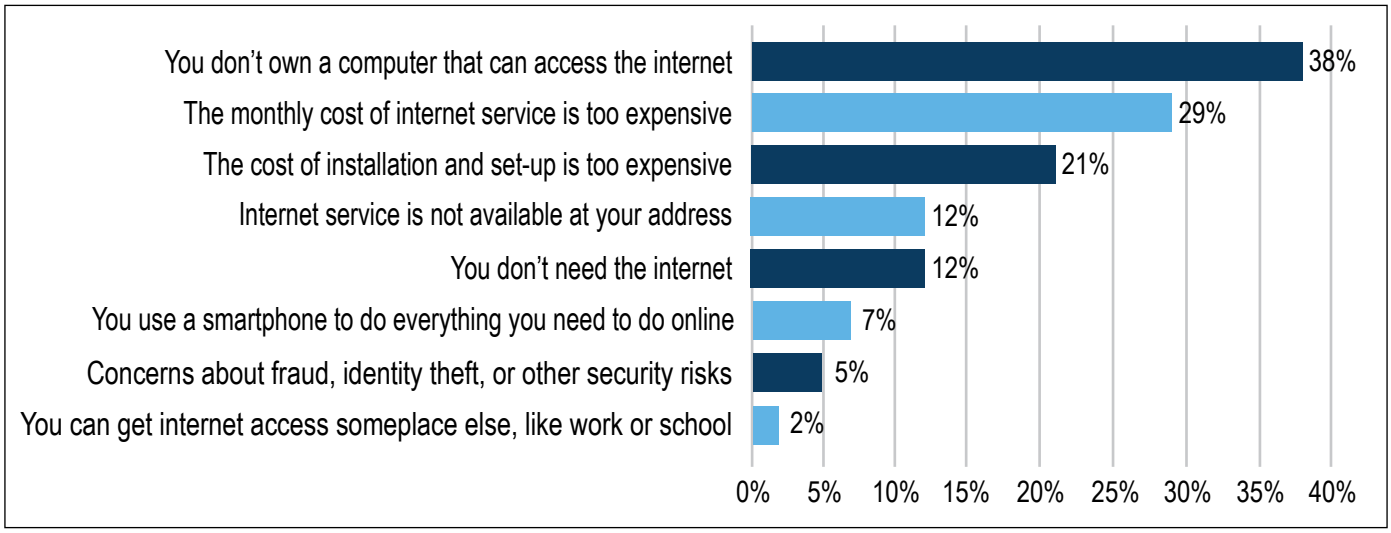


Figure 12. Why Racial or Ethnic Minority Groups Do Not Subscribe to Home Internet Service

Among all Kentuckians surveyed, 83.7% owned a computer.

Overall, racial and ethnic minorities had lower awareness about programs that could help them acquire devices and make internet service more affordable; 37.7% of non-white survey respondents had heard of the ACP, compared to 36.5% familiarity among all Kentuckians.

Rural Kentuckians

For the purposes of this plan, the map below identifies which counties are predominantly urban and which counties are predominantly rural across Kentucky.

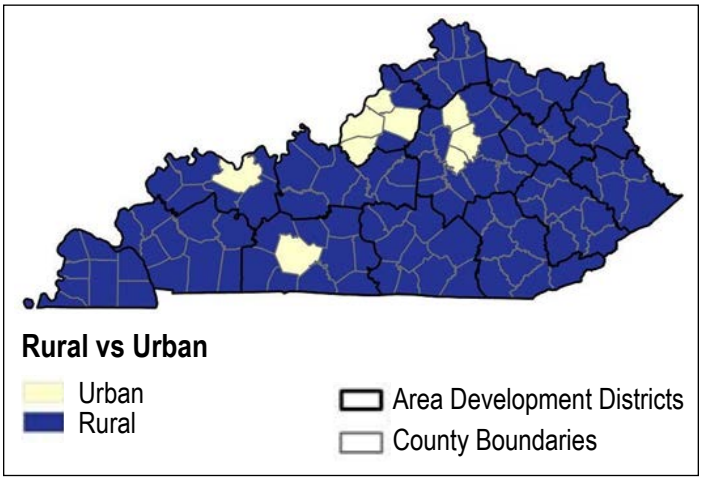


Figure 13 below highlights why rural residents without home internet service do not subscribe. The primary barrier facing this population is that the monthly cost of service is too expensive, closely followed by not owning a computer that can access the internet.

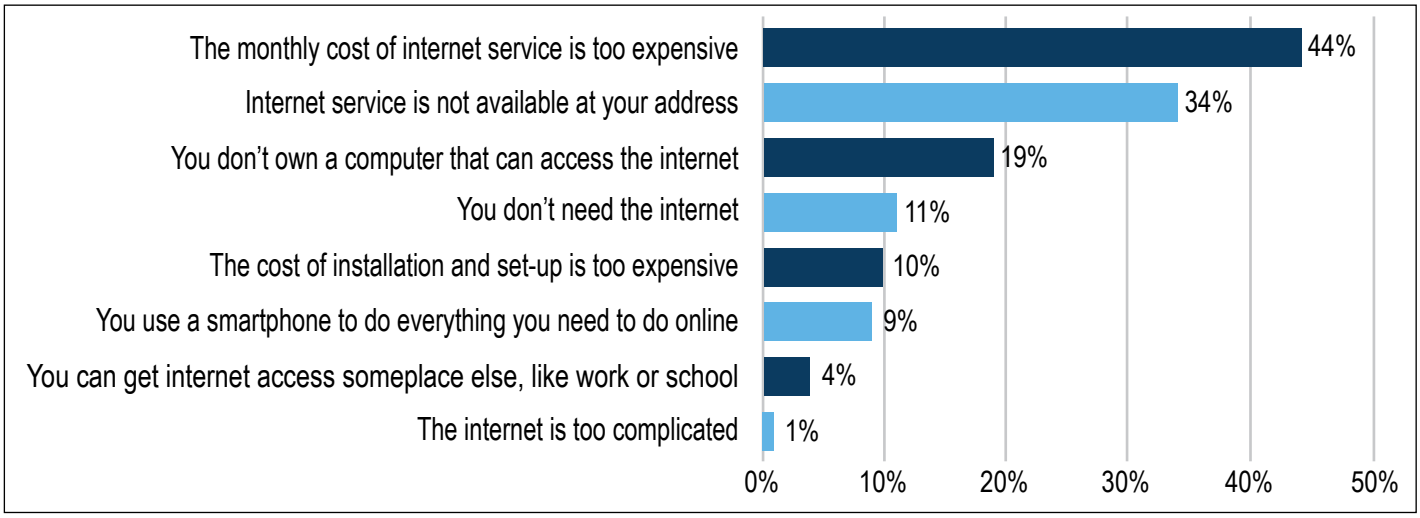


Figure 13. Why Rural Residents Do Not Subscribe to Home Internet Service

Table 6 below summarizes some of the unique challenges individuals living in rural areas face.

Finding	Quote
Rural areas may lack competition between internet service providers — making it easier to charge higher prices.	"I feel like there's not a lot of options for people that live out in the boonies. I have some friends, and there's only one company that works for them, and it's really expensive." "Like I said, we're paying over $100 a month for a basic phone and 5 Mbps internet. We could do satellite internet, but it is not very trustworthy."
In some areas, residents lacked the ability to get reliable internet service at all.	"There is no internet service provider where I live. We have to get satellite internet if we want it."
Being in a remote location also makes it difficult for rural residents without digital skills to access government services. Focus group participants cited transportation time and costs as a barrier, as well as limited staff to accommodate the demand.	"When people needed help to sign up for government programs, they said to go to their local library. The library is 45 minutes away. [People] don't have the gas money or time to drive 45 minutes to go over there, and doing it online is not an option. I drove to the library, and I spoke to him, and I said, 'Are you going to help all the people who would come for help?' They said we have a staff of two, we can't help them."

Persons with Disabilities

The map to the right illustrates the percentage of the population that has a physical or mental disability in each of Kentucky's counties.

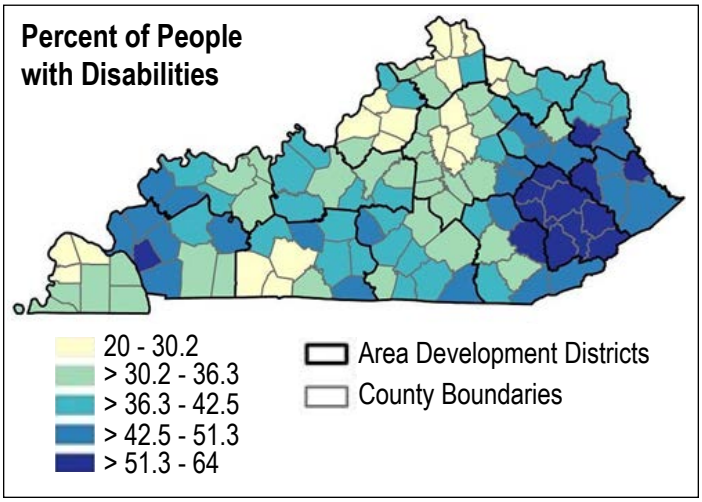


Figure 14 below shows why survey respondents without home internet service do not subscribe. The primary barrier for people with disabilities is that the monthly cost of internet service is too expensive.

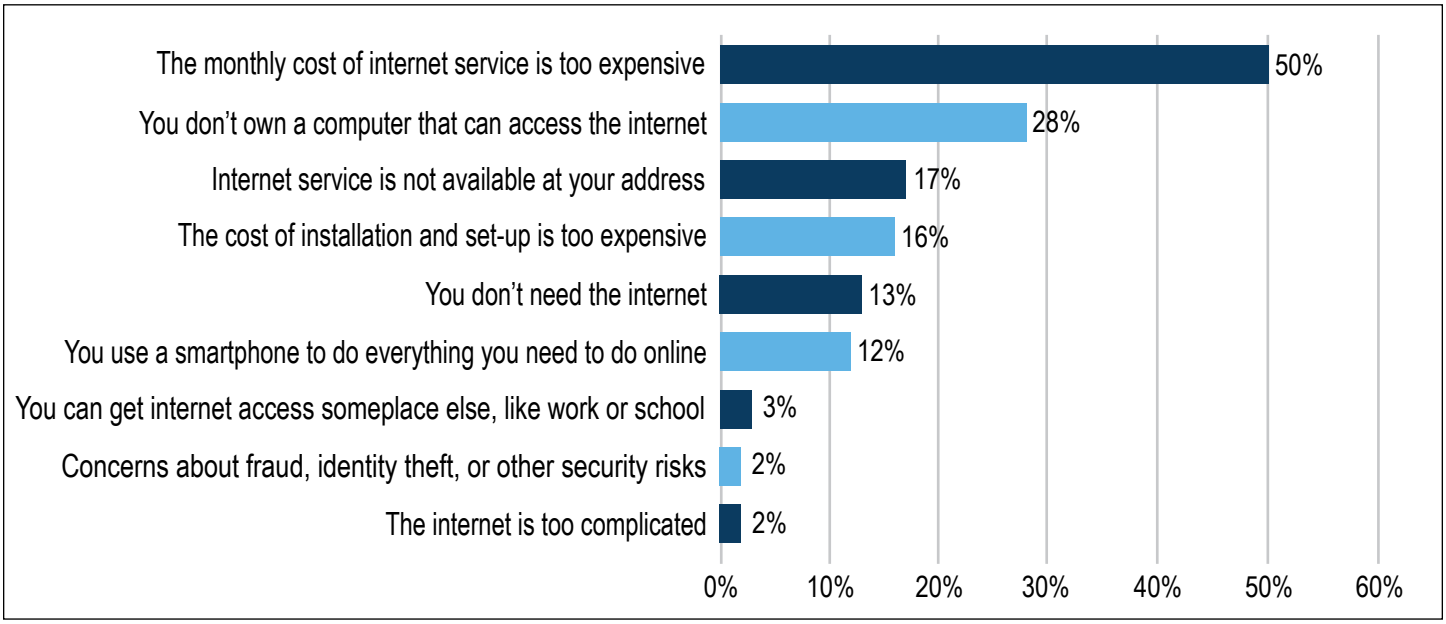


Figure 14. Why Kentuckians with Disabilities Do Not Subscribe to Home Internet Service

Open-ended feedback from the Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour provides additional insights into the unique challenges that this population faces.

Finding	Quote
People with disabilities can sometimes face accessibility challenges, which having reliable internet could help them with — especially with regards to telehealth and telework.	"Accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing is much needed. Internet access will allow them to make phone calls and receive interpreting services for health care."
Having a disability sometimes means that the individual is not able to work, and therefore reliant on a fixed income; as a result, this population may struggle with the ability to afford home internet service and computers.	"I'm on disability, I cannot work, so it's very hard for me to afford a computer."

Veterans

The map presented below identifies the percentage of the population that are veterans in each of Kentucky's counties.

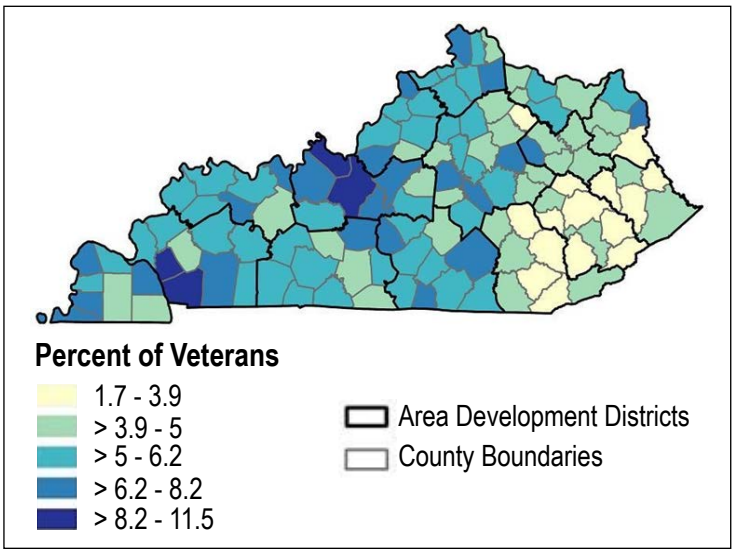


Figure 15 below highlights why veterans without home internet service do not subscribe. The primary barriers facing this population is the monthly cost of internet service and owning a computer that can access the internet.

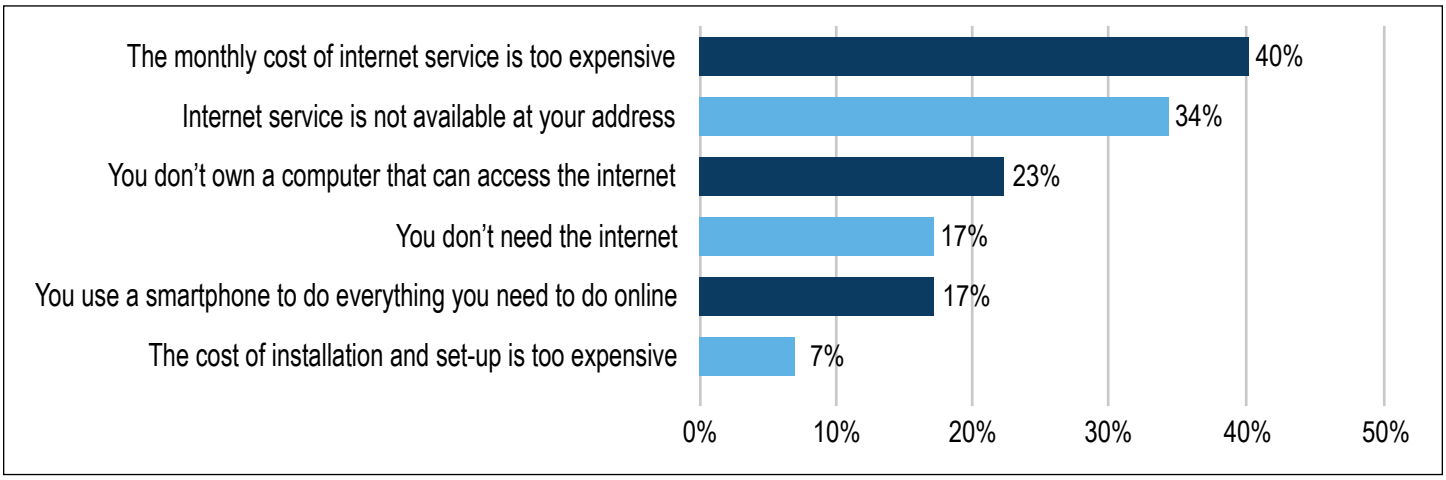


Figure 15. Why Veterans Do Not Subscribe to Home Internet Service

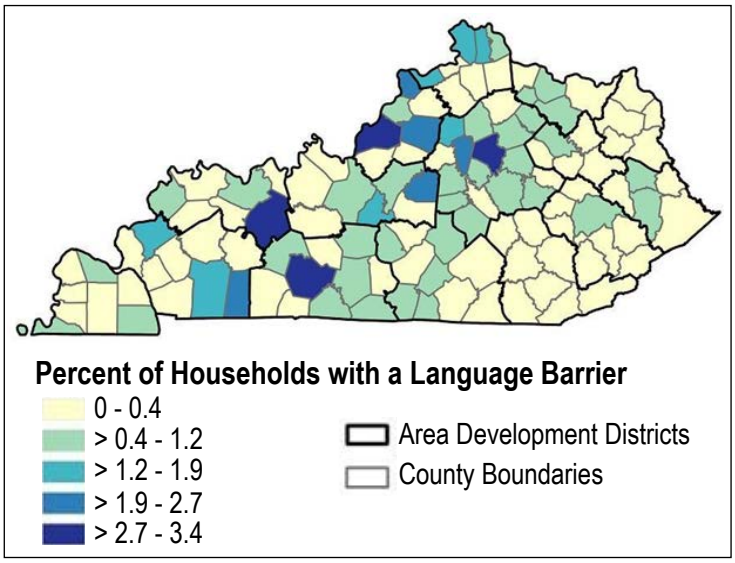
The ELC/DWD partnered with the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) to conduct three focus groups that illustrate the challenges veterans face related to the internet. These focus groups reached 21 individuals across three cities to share their experiences.

Table7 summarizes key takeaways from the veterans focus group.

Finding	Quote
In an increasingly digital world, many veterans without digital literacy skills struggle to find services and benefits that can improve their quality of life.	"They're not familiar with Facebook or how to look up stuff from 101st on Facebook because all this stuff is marketed digitally. It's not on billboards. It's not on the newspaper, it's marketed digitally. That's it, that's the biggest challenge, how to get the information to me."
For many veterans, lacking digital literacy skills means taking potentially unnecessary trips to see whether they qualify for benefits.	"And there's a lot of veterans out there that have no clue, and they go into the VA, they wait and then they become disgruntled where if you had a computer, it's all there."
Without digital literacy training, veterans also struggle to file medical claims once they have established their benefits.	"I have a lot of vets that come in because they can't get ahold of anybody or can't get appointments with KDVA and they're asking me to file claims because they know that I am a veteran."

Persons with a Language Barrier

The map below depicts the percentage of households in each county that do not speak English as their first language.



The residential survey did not identify enough individuals facing a language barrier without home internet service to infer why this population does not subscribe. However, the ELC/DWD partnered with the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA) to conduct a focus group with this population in Lexington to gain further insights.

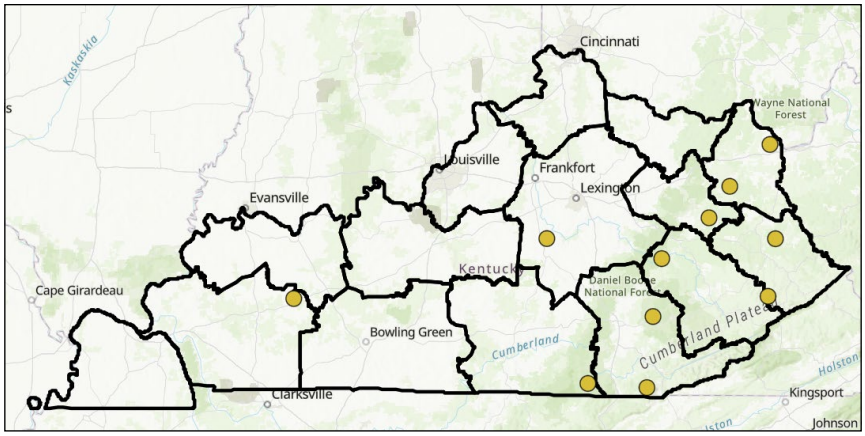
In total, this effort reached seven participants who shared some of the unique challenges that individuals with language barriers face in Kentucky.

Table 8 below identifies some of the challenges of those with language barriers.

Finding	Quote
While individuals with language barriers may benefit from digital skills training, communities struggle with offering digital literacy training to non-English speakers.	"[They] tried to offer computer classes in Spanish, [but there was] no one to speak Spanish."
Lacking digital literacy skills can also prevent individuals with language barriers from accessing basic government services.	"Person had to have paperwork for the courts. It was in English. She was told if you want Spanish, you have to go to the website. It's medical problems — the person doesn't have the time [or] skills."
General accessibility issues (because services are only offered in English) can also impact their ability to acquire digital literacy skills on their own.	"In addition to actually getting a device, when you're talking about people's ability to use, a site might offer some content in another language, but it's not consistent between the languages. You click on a link for a Spanish translation to something and that link is empty or it's not complete. And also, some of these sites don't also provide an option for someone to contact someone who can [help]."

Incarcerated Individuals

The map below identifies the locations of the state and federal correctional institutions where incarcerated individuals reside.



The surveys conducted by the ELC/DWD targeted households in their assessment of internet access and adoption. Due to this scope, incarcerated individuals and those living in group quarters were not included in the sample. The ELC/DWD partnered with Goodwill Industries to conduct three focus groups with justice-involved populations (people who have spent time in jails, youth correctional facilities, or prisons) in different cities across the state. This effort reached 33 participants who provided their insights.

Table 9 Challenges incarcerated individuals face.

Finding	Quote
For individuals who lived in correctional institutions for long periods of time, they may have little exposure to the internet and therefore lack digital skills.	"There's a lot of guys we're working with lately that have been incarcerated. They haven't had access to technology, except maybe renting [a computer] for an hour a month, but they've been in there for years. It takes a lot to teach them how to do basic things like shopping online." "If they don't know how to use a computer at all, it's hard for them to look stuff up."
Some focus group participants emphasized the importance of providing digital skills trainings in the correctional facilities themselves – so that incarcerated individuals can access resources to improve their lives.	"When I was incarcerated for two years, one of the things they taught was how to use a smartphone. I don't feel they were necessarily hands on. I think if we did that with some of the reentry services where we go into the jail and teach them that would help. Also how to do online banking, how to get online insurance, look up stuff for court, stuff like that. If they don't know how to look up something on parole, they'll keep being locked up."
Once able to use the internet freely, many formerly incarcerated individuals worry about the risks involved with using the internet.	"People are worried about stolen information. People are like, yeah I'm not doing that."

Summary of Common Barriers to Adoption by Covered Populations

The following table lists the common barriers that prevent certain covered populations from accessing the internet. Each X indicates the covered populations that disproportionately face each barrier – based on the 2023 ELC/DWD Kentucky Residential Technology Survey and common themes from the focus groups conducted.

Barriers	Aging Individuals	Low-Income Households	Rural Residents	Racial or Ethnic Minorities	People with Disabilities	Individuals with Language Barrier	Veterans	Incarcerated Persons
Monthly cost of internet too expensive	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Don't own a computer		X		X	X		X	
Internet service not available	X		X				X	
Lack of digital skills	X					X	X	X
Difficulty accessing resources (transportation issues, translation issues, etc.)					X	X		X

Differences Between Covered Populations

Altogether, 191 Kentucky adults participated in the focus groups, representing all eight covered populations. In addition, many focus group participants represented multiple covered populations (for example, a veteran over the age of 60 who lives in a rural area, or a member of a racial or ethnic minority group that also faces a language barrier). This nuance underscores the importance of ensuring digital equity for all covered populations. Because of these overlapping backgrounds, some issues would be better described as general barriers that are not specific to any covered population. These include:

- The affordability of internet service and devices
- Concerns about using the internet safely
- Lack of awareness about low-cost programs such as ACP
- Distrust and skepticism about low-cost programs

4 Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

4.1 Coordination and Outreach Strategy

Stakeholder engagement was a critical component of the ELC/DWD's strategy of developing a State Digital Equity Plan that is inclusive, well-informed, and supported by Kentuckians. By involving stakeholders throughout the process, the ELC/DWD created a more effective, sustainable, and equitable plan that addresses the needs and aspirations of the entire state. The ELC/DWD stakeholder engagement strategy included:

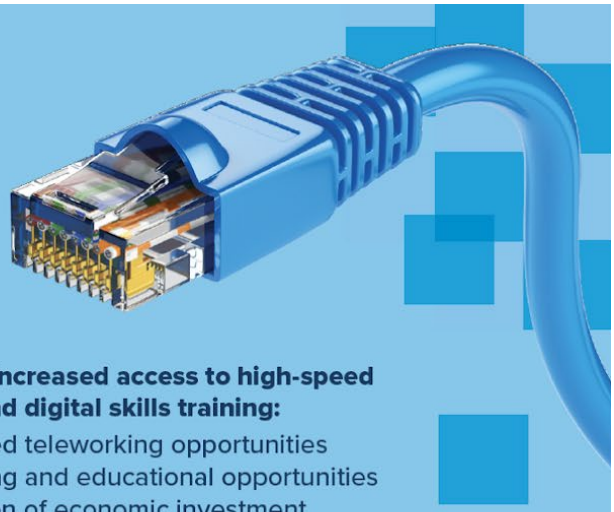
- The formation of a Digital Equity Core Workgroup to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered that stakeholders have opportunities for input and feedback, and that decisions are inclusive and representative. The workgroup met monthly and participated in a two-day Strategic Planning Session in July 2023 to provide input on goals and objectives of the Digital Equity Plan. The following organizations were represented in the workgroup:
  - Kentucky ELC (Administering entity's digital equity lead)

  - Metro Technology Services, a division of Louisville Metro Government
  - Kentucky State University (representing a minority-serving institution, such as a historically Black college or university)
  - Goodwill Industries of Kentucky (representing several of the covered populations and digital inclusion focused community-based organization)
  - Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives state library agency (representing libraries)
  - Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), a regional nonprofit focused on economic revitalization in Kentucky's 54 Appalachian counties (representing one of the covered populations and digital inclusion focused community-based organization)
  - Kentucky Office of Broadband Development, the central broadband planning and coordination entity to encourage, foster, develop, and improve broadband within the Commonwealth (Administering entity's broadband lead)
  - Kentucky Department of Workfroce Development (representing a workforce development agency)
  - Northern Kentucky University student (representing a lived expert from a covered population)
- Launching Kentucky's first digital equity website with the vision of raising awareness about the role that the ELC/DWD is playing in developing and implementing the State Digital Equity Plan. This website serves as a platform for promoting understanding of digital equity, sharing assets and resources, and ongoing stakeholder engagement.
- Conducted and/or participated in multiple stakeholder events.
  - For a list of many of the stakeholder outreach events, please see Appendix III.
- The ELC/DWD collaborated with the OBD to host a 14-stop listening tour, launched as a part of the Better Internet Initiative. The tour spanned the state, stopping in every region to gather public input on local broadband challenges, opportunities, and priorities for the State Digital Equity Plan.
  - The tour leveraged ADDs and their role as regional planners and convenors to host stakeholders and the public to attend each meeting.
  - The tour allowed the public to participate in the planning process and provide feedback on their connectivity directly to state broadband officials, with leaders from the ELC/DWD and the OBD at every tour stop.
  - The ELC/DWD and the OBD also hosted a statewide virtual listening tour stop to allow participation from residents who were unable to attend a tour stop in person.
  - 253 participants from counties across the state attended the meetings to share their local perspective.
  - Public promotion of the tour included outreach to local governments, community anchor institutions, and nonprofits serving covered populations. The ELC/DWD was able to activate its extensive workforce development and training networks across the state to spread the word about the events and share an outreach toolkit (sample email and flyer) for organizations to inform their networks as well.
  - The ELC/DWD partnered with the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide interpretive services during each tour stop and provided captioning upon request. During these tour stops, participants shared insight through a guided conversation and interactive polling about local barriers, solutions, and priorities for expanding high-speed internet access, adoption, and use.
  - This combination of structured conversation and quantitative data collection provided a robust depiction of regional challenges and opportunities, which informed the priorities and recommendations of this plan.
  - Key findings from the statewide analysis of the tour indicate that the top barrier to high-speed internet subscription was the cost of the service, with residents identifying high cost as a key descriptor of service in the state.
- Participants also identified the impact increased access to connectivity would have on their communities, including increased teleworking

options, upskilling and educational opportunities, and increased economic investment in the area. These results indicate that accessing and using affordable internet services could increase economic opportunity for Kentuckians and spur economic activity.

- Key state-level findings from the 14-Stop Better Internet Initiative Listening Tour:
  - Listening tour participants highlighted digital inclusion programs and opportunities available in their community.
  - Participants provided insight into the most prominent opportunities, with 64% indicating there was public access to computers, 58% indicating there was available public Wi-Fi, and 50% indicating there were telehealth services available in the area.
  - More digital inclusion opportunities available across the state are highlighted in the infographic below.

Summary of Common Perspectives Across the Commonwealth



Description of high-speed internet service in the Commonwealth:
Slow, unreliable, available, expensive, fast, inconsistent

Top barrier to high-speed internet subscription:
Internet service is too expensive

Available digital inclusion services:
1. Public access to computers
2. Public access to Wi-Fi connectivity
3. Telehealth services

Impact of increased access to high-speed internet and digital skills training:
1. Increased teleworking opportunities
2. Upskilling and educational opportunities
3. Attraction of economic investment

For regional results for each stop of the listening tour, refer to the individual region tour report found in Appendix VII.

- The Northern Kentucky Digital Literacy Workgroup and the ELC/DWD have been working together. The partnership provides basic digital literacy and technical support to adults of all ages in the Northern Kentucky (NKY) and Greater Cincinnati region through collaboration between community partners and Northern Kentucky University (NKU). The workgroup consists of 20 volunteer leaders from NKY community partners and NKU, and they primarily focus on helping adults who are unfamiliar with basic computer skills (using a mouse, computer function, etc.) and those who need digital literacy skills for educational or work purposes. They also provide a variety of assistance to individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and individuals with transportation needs. The Workgroup meets monthly to share best practices and strategies, discuss how to continue raising awareness of local digital literacy needs, and how to help individuals connect to digital literacy support services.
- AARP Kentucky has been a critical partner in our residential survey outreach and response efforts. This effort resulted in a dramatic uptick in survey responses in three days, going from 848 to 2,301 responses, which is a 368% increase--far exceeding our 1,500-response goal.

Maintaining Collaborations for Plan Implementation

To ensure the success of this plan, it is essential to engage with stakeholders and collaborate with various entities, including state agencies, local communities, community organizations, nonprofit organizations and other community anchor institutions. These groups must work together and be connected to enact change. The Digital Equity Core Workgroup will continue its efforts, while the ELC/DWD also will collaborate with existing and new relationships over the next five years.

Below is a list of a sampling of state and local collaborators:

- Office of Broadband Development (State, County & municipal governments)
- The Kentucky League of Cities (County & municipal governments)
- Kentucky Association of Counties (County & municipal governments)
- Kentucky Workforce Investment Board (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Kentucky Department of Education (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, low-income households, individuals with language barriers, and individuals with disabilities)
- Area Development Districts (ADDs) (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, low-income households, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Kentucky Office of Adult Education (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, low-income households, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Career Development Office (Jobs for Veterans Grant; covered populations: rural, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Kentucky Office of Cybersecurity (Cybersecurity and internet safety)
- City of Louisville (Covered Populations: Individuals with language barriers, low-income households, ethnic minorities)
- United Way (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Goodwill Industries (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Red Bird Mission (Covered populations: rural, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Life Learning Center (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Simmons College (Local educational agencies; ethnic minority covered Population)
- SOAR (Workforce development, rural covered population)
- Northern Kentucky University Digital Literacy Workgroup (Local educational agencies; ethnic minority covered Population)
- AmeriCorps (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- AARP (Covered Populations: rural, individuals with disabilities, veterans, and aging individuals)
- Department of Corrections (Covered Populations: incarcerated individuals)
- Department of Aging and Independent Living (Covered Populations: rural, individuals with disabilities, veterans, and aging individuals)
- Center for Rural Development (CRD) (Covered Populations: rural individuals)
- County Extension Offices (County & municipal governments)
- Kentucky Career Centers (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Kentucky Nonprofit Network (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Local Workforce Development Boards (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, incarcerated, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)

- Labor Organizations (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, low-income households, individuals with language barriers, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)
- Internet Service Providers (ISP) (Covered Populations: rural, ethnic minorities, low-income households, individuals with language barriers, aging individuals, veterans, and individuals with disabilities)

A full list of our collaborators/stakeholders can be found in Appendix X.

In addition to collaborating with some of the stakeholders to implement new or existing digital equity strategies as outlined in Section 5.1 of the plan, ELC/DWD will remain engaged with stakeholders via the following outreach activities:

- Host quarterly meetings with the Digital Equity Core Workgroup
- Host an annual Digital Equity Summit to bring together stakeholders to provide updates and solicit input on Kentucky's ongoing activities.
- Host quarterly meetings for key implementation stakeholders that will provide opportunities to present updates on the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant and gather feedback from stakeholders.
- Share information via newsletters, email, social media, and/or website updates, as outlined in the strategies in section 5.1.
- Meet with local government, ISPs, and community leaders to advance digital equity goals and objectives, and recruit champions in Kentucky.
- Offer opportunities for public comments and feedback on initiatives and programs launched as a part of the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program for stakeholders and members of a covered population with the digital equity website and other resources.

The Commonwealth's Digital Equity Plan was submitted for public comment on September 15, 2023 and again on January, 4, 2024. During both comment periods, it was placed on the Digital Equity website, digitalequity.ky.gov. Promotional efforts were made by ELC's Communications Office, with social media posts and mass emails to stakeholders and interested parties. Additionally, personal emails were sent to our State Digital Equity Core Workgroup, Trusted Community Partners and Stakeholders soliciting comments and for distribution. By design, the published plan was modified to allow electronic comment with a system designed to deliver comments to the Digital Equity State Team upon receipt. A total of eleven comments were received and responded to individually. The public comment period closed after the required 30 days and a compilation of the comments are included in this plan, as well as the responses and actions taken. As the plan developed beyond the initial public comment period, and in response to the public comments received, a second public comment period began January 4, 2024. An additional comment was received during that time. It was processed and included in the Plan before final submission in February 2024.

5 Implementation

Advancing Digital Equity in Kentucky

5.1 Implementation Strategy & Key Activities

To address the challenges faced by Kentuckians in achieving full digital equity, this Plan outlines six measurable objectives along with corresponding strategies, and activities to advance digital equity and overcome barriers (affordability of broadband service and devices, accessibility of government services, lack of digital skills and literacy, and internet safety) faced by Kentuckians in accessing digital resources. In addition, the objectives are meant to help advance economic, education and healthcare outcome via digital equity.

Each objective in the plan addresses the digital equity needs of all covered populations and also targets at least one specific covered population with specific actions due to high level of need or gap that was identified during the information gathering and stakeholder engagement process. For each objective, the plan includes two or more strategies and related activities resulting in a multifaceted approach to meeting the objective. The plan also highlights collaborators for each activity, if known. Finally, the implementation strategy and key activities includes impact measures and output measures to evaluate the success and effectiveness of the plan. Impact measures will gauge the effect on meeting the objective beginning with established

baseline data, while output measures will quantify the productivity and efficiency of the plan. Overall, the objectives, strategies, and actions are designed to overcome barriers to digital equity for covered populations and impact and interact with the Commonwealth's (i) economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes; (ii) education outcomes, (iii) health outcomes; (iv) civic and social engagement; and (v) delivery of essential services.

Objective 1 (OB1): Enhance broadband availability and affordability for covered populations. The Digital Equity Plan prioritizes addressing affordability barriers to widespread internet use. Many Kentuckians face challenges with paying for internet service. Our survey showed that 47% of those who do not have home internet service cited the monthly cost as the reason. **The survey also found that low-income individuals (47%) and those living in rural areas (44%) face affordability as the biggest barrier to broadband adoption**. Therefore, Objective 1 aims to increase adoption among these groups.

In addition, the Commonwealth's strategies include supporting the OBD by sharing critical data on covered populations, promoting affordable and low-cost internet programs, and addressing issues and needs in areas where covered populations live such as multi-dwelling units, assisted living facilities, and homeless shelters.

Strategy 1 (OB1-S1): Optimize broadband deployment in partnership with the OBD by sharing data regarding covered populations to inform the prioritization process and develop strategies.

Actions

- Support and collaborate with the OBD by providing necessary reports and other strategies as needed with regards to connectivity and affordability needs of covered populations. Creating covered population maps is one way the ELC/DWD already has begun to create data layers that may be useful to the OBD in prioritizing deployment resources.
- Develop and distribute materials (newsletter, publication, social media, etc.) to provide updates on deployment among key digital equity stakeholders, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis. This information will help keep stakeholders informed while providing opportunities for feedback of ongoing local needs and/or opportunities.
- Encourage statewide speed test initiatives in areas populated by covered populations, such as multi-dwelling units (MDUs), and support the analysis and distribution of the results.
- Analyze data from the OBD and the Center for Rural Development (CRD) on statewide speed tests to determine internet usability in areas inhabited by covered populations.

Strategy 2 (OB1-S2): Detect and alleviate obstacles and barriers preventing broadband expansion and adoption by facilities and communities that provide services to covered populations.

Actions

- Intentionally locate and prioritize providing access to intermittent housing, group homes, assisted living facilities, MDUs, and homeless shelters in partnership with agencies such as the Department of Corrections, the Department of Aging and Independent Living, local nonprofits, and local workforce boards.
- Leverage KYSTAT data collection, stakeholder engagements, and other resources to identify facilities that provide services to covered populations that may be unserved or underserved.
- Promote the development of regional or county-level digital equity plans via regional events, newsletters, summits and other engagement opportunities since ELC/DWD was not able to find such plans.

Strategy 3 (OB1-S3): Build a publicly accessible catalog of state and national subsidies on the digital equity website.

Actions

- Identify and gather resources to promote available resources, particularly those that are free or low-cost, have low barriers to participation, and directly benefit the covered populations (for example, ISPs, local governments, and community-based organizations). These plans must meet or exceed the FCC's definition for high-speed internet and cost no more than 2% of a household's income. This catalog will include eligibility requirements, cost, and available discounts. It should also be updated quarterly and be easily accessible.

- Track penetration rate over time and audit programs quarterly on participation rates.
- Conduct regional convenings to promote digital equity throughout the state and encourage local communities to adopt the principles of digital equity.

Strategy 4 (OB1-S4): Identify and increase participation rates in low-cost or affordable broadband programs such as the ACP in targeted communities that have lower participation rates than the national average.

Actions

- To make the most impact and efficiently support our covered populations, the ELC/DWD will collaborate with local partners, including school districts, libraries, and workforce development boards, to promote low-cost programs to increase participation in the rural counties and low-income communities experiencing low ACP adoption rates and high covered population concentration:
  - Less than 10% in the first year
  - Less than 20% in the second year
  - Less than 30% in the third year
- Identify and highlight communities or organizations across the Commonwealth that are excelling at promoting affordable programs in creative and unique ways.

Strategy 5 (OB1-S5): Promote community anchor institutions with free Wi-Fi or hot spot loan programs as a stopgap measure.

Actions

- Promote entities and programs such as the KDLA bookmobiles, equipment loan programs, school district programs, community-based organizations, and Learn Without Limits.
- Collaborate with local Workforce Investment Boards serving covered populations to encourage device distribution or lending programs for people from covered populations.

Strategy 6 (OB1-S6): Leverage existing funds in partnership with the OBD.

Actions

- Evaluate future grants, and utilize existing local Workforce Development grants, such as the Quality Equity, Strategy, and Training (QUEST) grant, and other discretionary funding sources.

Measuring Success for Objective 1	
Impact Measures	**Output Measures**
Covered Population Success Measure: Increase broadband adoption by low-income individuals and individuals residing in rural areas by 2% annually by helping them overcome the affordability barrier. Current baseline data on affordability: • 47% of low-income persons and • 44% of people residing in a rural area without broadband struggle with affording access. Conduct three longitudinal residential broadband surveys at the end of Years 2, 4, and 5 to track progress. This data will provide updates on affordability, barriers to adoption, changes in adoption, and internet use trends. Current baseline data is as follows: • 47% of all members of covered populations without broadband struggle with affording it and • 25% do not have internet available at their homes.	Develop an annual report and analysis on access to broadband for covered populations to be shared with the OBD.
Track subscription, conversion rates, list growth rates, open rates, and/or engagement by digital equity stakeholders of newsletters and/or other distributed materials. ELC/DWD will establish baseline data in the first quarter of publishing newsletters and other distributed materials.	Annually update catalog of state and national subsidies on Digital Equity website.
Assess the impact of the OBD deployment efforts and on areas concentrated by covered populations in the year beginning one year after deployments have begun. This will be done by tracking changes in broadband subscriptions by covered populations. This will be done by gathering qualitative data from covered populations in the target areas and organizations that serve them.	Resource materials are created and distributed across the Commonwealth.

Track participation in low-cost and affordable programs in communities where the ELC/DWD supports promoting programs in partnership with local entities such as school districts. Baseline data will be established from the first residential survey of covered populations.	Create a PSA and/or flyers that promote the work.
Covered Population Success Measure: A 3% increase in ACP participation a year in targeted counties among low-income individuals and individuals residing in rural areas annually. As of September 25, 2023, 50.1% of eligible households subscribed to the program.	

Objective 2 (OB2): Ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians.
This objective prioritizes addressing the device affordability barrier for internet adoption and use. This is particularly an issue in rural counties with low household income rates (covered households) such as Owsley County, where up to 31% of households lack computing devices — the highest rate of any county in the state. Additionally, computer ownership was identified as the lead barrier for individuals from a racial or ethnic minority group. This objective promotes increased access to affordable devices by not only expanding the availability of such devices, but also increasing opportunities for Kentucky businesses and community organizations to get involved in an expanded device ecosystem.

Strategy 1 (OB2-S1): Create a sustainable device ecosystem in alignment with local digital equity plans, particularly in areas with low device ownership.

Actions

- Leverage existing partners including the City of Louisville, Simmons College of Kentucky and SOAR and other organizations to determine common needs and practices within the first year.
- Identify any policy barriers to device refurbishments and collaborate with policymakers to remove them.
- Determine best practices to develop a "Learn and Earn" program that provides free devices upon successful completion of digital skills training.
- Partner with key community stakeholders to promote low-cost devices ownership among ethnic minorities to increase the current rate of 72.4% by 2 % each year.

Strategy 2 (OB2-S2): Identify and promote device refresh programs to deploy/sell low-cost refurbished devices to covered populations in collaboration with local governments.

Actions

- Partner with government agencies and schools to develop a framework to sustainably handle the "refresh cycles" (devices nearing the end of their use within the agency but can still be utilized). This will prepare them to become available for safe distribution to covered populations.
- Encourage colleges, universities, area technology centers, and local vocational programs to be involved in the refurbishment of devices.
- Explore opportunities with the Registered Apprenticeship program through DWD's Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services to expand the workforce available to support device refurbishing.
- Identify, support, and promote nonprofit electronic refurbishing programs in Kentucky to have the capacity to both refurbish and properly recycle devices (end of life e-cycle program) throughout the life of the Digital Equity Act funding.

Prioritize outreach and awareness activities in rural areas or counties with more than 15% of households lacking household devices.

Strategy 3 (OB2-S3): Capitalize on funding to drive impact while balancing urgency, universality, and equity.

Actions

- Promote local grant writers to include device funding in grant requests to anticipate device needs when working with covered populations.
- Support local partners on how to apply for waivers from FCC for non-providers to purchase devices for ACP program and recoup a portion or all device cost through the program/voucher.
- Support device upgrades to incarcerated individuals in partnership with DOC.

Measuring Success for Objective 2	
Impact Measures	**Output Measures**
Covered Population Success Measure: Increase computer ownership by individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group and individuals in rural areas by 3% each year in partnership with government agencies, schools, private companies and other stakeholders who prioritize low-cost or affordable devices. Based on current data: • 28% of racial or ethnic minorities and • 15% of individuals residing in rural areas do not own at least one device that can access the internet. Track progress in device adoption via three residential surveys conducted at the end of Year 2, 4 and 5 to track progress.	Document mitigation efforts in collaboration with OBD based on annual performance data each year beginning in Year 3.
Track the number of new low-cost device programs initiated from Year 2 to 5. Baseline will be established in Year 2.	Develop a sustainable device ecosystem with the City of Louisville, Simmons College and SOAR that will serve as a model program with expansion within 2 years. Within the model program will be "Learn and Earn" curriculum and programs.
Evaluate the impact of government and private-sector initiatives aimed at improving device ownership in underserved communities. Evaluation will be done in collaboration with stakeholders that provide services to covered populations.	Complete an environmental scan and distribution of device refurbishers and make them available in all 120 counties.
Monitor the adoption rates of programs that provide subsidies or discounts on devices and internet services to low-income individuals for continuous improvement.	RFPs that address urgency, universality, and equity meeting the needs of covered populations and evaluation rubrics to support them.
Release a best practice report on the "Learn and Earn" program that provides free devices upon successful completion of digital skills training by the end of the second year.	

Objective 3 (OB3): Increase application accessibility and inclusivity to state and local government programs.

This objective aims to provide easy access to government services and information for everyone, regardless of abilities, disabilities, language barriers, cultural sensitivities, or education levels. Accessible applications lead to efficient interactions, clearer communication, and streamlined processes that benefit all users. Accordingly, this objective provides pathways that existing applications are adequately and readily available to Kentuckians as they are often the pathway to critical resources. **To fill the accessibility gap for individuals with disabilities, this objective will help to increase their access to online resources, telehealth services, and remote jobs. Additionally, this objective will increase access to critical materials in multiple languages to address the language barriers**.

Strategy 1(OB3-S1): Conduct an accessibility study on critical state programs that are most frequently used by the covered populations.

Actions

- Identify the most visited and critical state-run programs that serve covered populations. Partner with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to conduct

accessibility studies to determine the trends in accessibility of critical state government websites and/or resources every other year of the grant period.

- Make available the known resources in design and user testing to promote user-friendly design and consistency in government websites, programs, and applications, making digital equity a priority in design.
- Encourage state agencies and nonprofits to create culturally sensitive materials in multiple formats and languages that reflect the communities they serve.
- Conduct open forums for state agencies and local organizations representing individuals with language barriers to share best practices on enhancing accessibility and inclusivity of applications, at least every other year.

Strategy 2 (OB3-S2): Make it easier for covered populations to access government resources and programs online.

Actions

- Collaborate with workforce agencies in developing statewide digital navigator and promote their presence at community events.
- Support community organizations to utilize readily available government websites for community work and serving covered populations.
- Encourage Kentucky state agencies and local governments to prioritize accessibility, transparency, user-friendliness, when deploying resources and services online.

Strategy 3 (OB3-S2: Identify and/or develop an assessment tool for local governments to improve citizens' overall experience in accessing government services online.

Actions

- Educate city and county governments on how to have active, accessible, and easily understandable websites.
- Encourage beta testing websites with ADA experts and digital navigator, providing resources when available and necessary.
- Develop resources and periodic communications that quantify what constitutes a positive digital experience for individuals with disabilities.

Strategy 4 (OB3-S4): Improve civic and social engagement for covered populations on virtual platforms..

Actions

- Engage local community leaders on the importance of inclusivity for civic and social engagement.
- Promote Digital Inclusion in local culture as a platform for advancing online civic and social engagement for covered populations.
- Work to reduce stigma for covered populations utilizing online resources.

Strategy 5 (OB3-S5): Enhance the delivery of other essential services, such as emergency management alert efforts for covered populations.

Actions

- Ongoing digital training/education/awareness for service providers, local and state government services. Bring awareness to programs such as the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's emergency kits for the hard of hearing for use during emergencies.
- Support a multi-pronged approach to communication efforts.
- Provide support to libraries and trusted community partners to ensure they have the appropriate information, supplies, and community knowledge to provide help to patrons and individuals from covered populations.
- Encourage partnership with the public service commission and the United Way of Kentucky to explore how to authorize 211 and referral hotline available 24/7 year-round in all Kentucky counties.

Measuring Success for Objective 3	
Impact Measures	**Output Measures**
Covered Population Success Measure: Increased enrollment, participation, and engagement rates in critical state-run programs annually for individuals with disabilities and with a language barrier over the five-year period in partnership with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and other entities that serve covered populations. An increase of 3% a year from Kentuckians accessing government services. ELC/DWD's residential survey showed that only 19% of Kentuckians were using a computer or a smartphone to access government services. Success will be measured as follows: • Track progress in use of online government resources via three residential surveys conducted at the end of Year 2, 4 and 5 to track progress. • Gather qualitative and quantitative data on use of online government services from agencies that provide those services such as Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Goodwill Industries and other organizations providing services to covered populations.	Request accessibility studies on critical state-run programs from relevant agencies and/or perform accessibility studies within the ELC/DWD's jurisdiction annually.
Promote the advancement of the 211-referral hotline in partnership with the Kentucky Public Service Commission and the United Way of Kentucky over the five-year plan period.	Conduct annual interviews with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders serving individuals with language barriers.

• *Covered Population Success Measure:* Increase in citizen satisfaction pertaining to improved accessibility by 2029. Baseline qualitative and quantitative data for measuring success will be gathered during the first year of plan implementation. Success measures include:
  • Annual customer satisfaction surveys of online services to be selected in partnership with other agencies and nonprofits.
  • Qualitative data derived from annual interviews and convenings with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders serving individuals with language barriers.
	Completed accessibility study and partnered with state programs to address outcomes.

Track remote job employment rates annually for individuals with disabilities over the five-year period.	Annual customer satisfaction survey (in partnership with other agencies) that includes accessibility and publish results that will be used for continuous improvement.

	Develop assessment tool in Year 1; deploy in Years 2 and 3; assess in Year 4. Year 1 create a playbook for civic and social engagement. Years 2 to 5 distribute the playbook/resource to community organizations (schools, libraries, community centers).
	Convene covered population round tables with state and local emergency management entities as requested.

Objective 4 (OB4): Ensure that all Kentuckians are equipped to navigate the internet safely. This objective involves creating various tools to be used by local community partners to bring awareness to internet safety and prepare covered populations to navigate the internet safely. Fear of using the internet is a barrier to broadband adoption. A good indicator of the importance of this objective is the focus groups of justice-involved individuals. A participant highlighted that once able to use the internet freely, **formerly incarcerated individuals worry about internet safety**. This objective prioritizes critical tools including certifications for internet safety training, using media and public service announcements to raise awareness, and collaborating with law enforcement and cybersecurity experts to develop relevant materials.

Strategy 1 (OB4-S1): Identify existing and/or develop and deliver basic internet safety and fundamental online resources and post them on the digital equity website.

Actions

- Encourage local partners to utilize curriculum and create pathways to certifications and program completion in areas like basic skills and internet safety.
- Partner with organizations supporting justice-involved individuals including Goodwill Industries of Kentucky to encourage pathways to teach digital skills and literacy, including certificate of completion upon release to assist with re-entry.
- Collaborate with K-12 institutions to engage community efforts to teach digital skills and literacy.

Strategy 2 (OB4-S2): Create and distribute publicly accessible internet safety protocol documents and posters at places where covered populations frequently use public computers and Wi-Fi such as libraries.

Actions

- Partner with the local community to distribute internet safety information in existing:
  - School correspondence
  - Grocery stores
  - "Welcome to Community" packets, a welcome wagon at DMVs
  - Laundromats, community centers, story times with libraries
  - Bookmobiles
  - Barber shops/beauty salons
  - Job fair packets
  - Local chamber of commerce groups
- Develop ways to incorporate internet safety training on how to access public Wi-Fi.
- Encourage a "hard-to-ignore" sign-in screen to promote internet safety.
- Encourage the practice of having distributed devices come with pre-installed icons that link to a helpdesk or digital navigator portal installed on the desktop for easy access.
- Produce public service announcements (PSAs) around internet safety and security.

Strategy 3 (OB4-S3): Collaborate with the Kentucky Office of Cybersecurity to identify and/or develop and/or promote best practice resources on internet safety targeting covered populations in

their communities.

Actions

- Work with experts at the Kentucky Homeland Security's Fusion Center, libraries, and community partners to develop statewide cybersecurity resources.
- Promote free online tools such as firewalls, antivirus, or full-suite software.
- Collaborate with experts from the Kentucky Office of Cybersecurity to develop countermeasures needed against cyber threats that affect covered populations.
- Promote the adoption of internet of things (IoT) security measures as a standard methodology.

Measuring Success for Objective 4	
Impact Measures	**Output Measures**
Track the use of cybersecurity resources and online tools shared via the ELC/DWD's digital equity website and developed in partnership with the Kentucky Office of Cybersecurity, Kentucky Homeland Fusion Center, libraries, and other community partners. Baseline data will be established when the information is available electronically by Year 2.	In partnership with community stakeholders, develop PSAs and/or marketing strategies to promote internet safety courses.
Track performance of PSAs by tracking the number of stations airing them, the total number of airings, the total value of those airings, and total impressions. Baseline data will be established when the PSA is released.	Develop internet safety protocol documents and posters for distribution in cooperation with community partners.
Covered Population Success Measure: Track the number of justice-involved (formerly incarcerated) individuals who successfully complete training on a quarterly basis. Baseline data will be established during the first quarter of the program launch.	Update the digital equity website with the identified resources on a semi-annual basis.
Assessment of internet safety as a barrier for internet use via the three residential surveys to be conducted in Year 2, 4 and 5 of the Digital Equity Plan.	
Covered Population Success Measure: Assess confidence and self-efficacy — provide self-assessment tools to training providers so they can ask participants about their confidence levels in using the internet safely before and after the training. Baseline data will be established after the first year.	

Objective 5 (OB5): Improve digital literacy for all covered populations in Kentucky.
This objective provides a pathway to tackle the basic digital literacy barrier to broadband adoption. For many Kentucky residents, a lack of digital literacy represents a barrier to adopting and using home internet service and is reflected in the number of residents in the survey and focus groups who don't feel comfortable using a computer or going online. More specifically, **veterans indicated that lack of digital literacy was a barrier to adopting broadband during the focus group**. Additionally, key findings about **aging individuals indicated that digital literacy skills are one of the leading barriers to broadband adoption**.

This Plan will provide tools that will empower trusted local partners to effectively enhance existing programs or begin new programs that are easily accessible by covered populations. The Plan also allows the Commonwealth to establish the definition of digital citizenship and get buy-in from stakeholders.

Strategy 1 (OB5-S1): Define digital citizenship in the Commonwealth and roll out with key stakeholders.

Actions

- Work with digital equity stakeholders and trusted partners including the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), to expand the framework for digital citizenship accessible to all residents across state. At present, KDE provides digital citizenship curriculum only accessible by students and adults associated with a school district. Thus KDE's important work will this could serve as the foundation for a statewide definition of digital citizenship
- Explore how to standardize digital skills and literacy through recognized credentials, much like how GED and high school diplomas are standardized.
- Promote the practice of celebrating achievements through a public ceremony to empower citizens and inspire others.

Strategy 2 (OB5-S2): Improve Kentuckians' digital literacy via private-public partnerships to promote or enhance existing programs.

Actions

- Encourage entities such as Area Development Districts (ADDs), Workforce Boards, County Extension Offices and other nonprofit networks to continue offering digital inclusion resources and community outreach.
- Facilitate meetings with key education and training partners, community-based organizations and stakeholders around developing core digital skills/certifications requirements as needed and share best practices.
- Leverage agencies within the Department of Workforce Development as well as community partners to incorporate digital equity into registered apprenticeships, re-entry, and other workforce talent pipelines.
- Continue the Asset Inventory to capture new and expanding programs across the Commonwealth.

Strategy 3 (OB5-S3): Build an interactive digital inclusion map so all Kentuckians can find training resources and support near them.

Actions

- Maintain the interactive digital inclusion map managed by the ELC/DWD to allow for research and longitudinal data opportunities.
- Partner with digital inclusion organizations to develop a tool to incorporate the interactive digital inclusion map to determine user experience or skill level.
- Continue ongoing data collection to gather the work being done in communities by ongoing promotion of the asset inventory instrument and interactive digital inclusion map.
- Require that partners complete the asset inventory instrument when applying for future grant opportunities through the Digital Equity Act.

Strategy 4 (OB5-S4): Enhance the digital aptitude and self-assurance of covered populations in Kentucky by implementing an enhanced Digital Equity program through our collaborative partnership model.

Actions

- Encourage local digital inclusion practitioners and digital equity stakeholders to develop or adopt modules that follow a tiered approach to teach digital skills and offer incentives such as certificates of completion.
- Identify opportunities that support digital navigators and/or having a digital citizenship transcript that records every tier, program, or course completed.
- Support the development and growth of peer-to-peer support programs to continue sharing knowledge within communities, with the goal of engaging local lived experts in the programs.

Measuring Success for Objective 5	
Impact Measures	**Output Measures**
Covered Population Success Measure: Assessment of digital literacy levels via the three residential surveys to be conducted in Years 2, 4 and 5 of the Digital Equity Plan. This data will be used to determine impact measures on veterans and aging individuals.	Development of an inventory of success stories that highlight local lived experiences.
Covered Population Success Measure: Increase in digital literacy training program opportunities across Kentucky as verified through the asset inventory map on an annual basis available to veterans and aging populations. Current baseline data as established in the asset inventory is as follows: • 19% of organizations provide digital literacy training services to veterans. • 24% provided the same services to older adults.	Expand and adopt a framework digital citizenship for all residents within the first 12 months of the program
Covered Population Success Measure: Attendance rates — track the number of veterans and aging individuals who attended the training sessions provided by partners for the programs funded by the ELC/DWD Office of Systems Equity. Baseline data will be established after the first year of training programs.	Development of an inventory of key community-based organizations and stakeholders that offer core skills/ certifications requirements and best practices to navigate tensions between shared digital literacy and skills building curriculums and audience/usage specific training.
	Assess changes in digital inclusion services over the 5-year period.
	Year 1: Define digital literacy. Year 2: Create the roll out strategy with key partners. Year 3 and beyond: Educate and execute.
	Incorporate digital literacy certifications in the Commonwealth's Learning Employment Records (LERs) initiative.

Objective 6 (OB6): Help Kentuckians develop the digital skills necessary for work and life.
This objective will ensure Kentuckians have the skills necessary to use digital tools to secure and retain jobs, access health care resources, improve educational outcomes, and engage with essential services. It is important to note that digital skills have become increasingly necessary in today's job market. According to the National Skills Coalition, 92% of jobs require basic digital skills, however, a third of Americans have low or no digital skills. Additionally, in Kentucky, only 33.9% of people are using the internet for teleworking, about 65.6% are using it for online banking, less than 50% are using it for healthcare related activities, and 17.4% are participating in online learning, as shown in Table 2 on page 28. To address this digital divide, it is important to empower Kentuckians to access critical services, resources, tools, and opportunities in healthcare, distance learning, and economic opportunity. By doing so, we can set Kentuckians up for success in both the workforce and in life. **This objective allows for alignment of the Digital Equity Plan with Kentucky's economic, workforce development, health care, and education goals, plans, and outcomes and is designed to benefit all covered populations**. To do this, this plan offers assessments and certification opportunities, partnerships with agencies that oversee education, health care, and essential programs such as SNAP to establish alignment with the State Digital Equity Plan.

Strategy 1 (OB6-S1): Offer personal digital skills assessments and certifications in Kentucky to all who wish to achieve their goals or attain a basic digital literacy skill level.

Actions

- Offer all covered populations digital skills and literacy education platforms through Cabinet opportunities, including the Kentucky Career Center, within the ELC/DWD.
- Utilize the Kentucky Office of Adult Education's local provider network that currently offers digital literacy assessments, certificates, and upskilling through the Northstar Digital Literacy platform.
- Connect outcomes to baseline data to inform grant requirements for community-based organizations.
- Utilize pre-assessments to focus on areas of opportunity and growth and record of completion
- Explore the feasibility of connecting digital citizenship milestones to a longitudinal database to track progress and success

Strategy 2 (OB6-S2): Incorporate digital skills training into existing education, training, and workforce development programs.

Actions

- Collaborate with existing workforce programs including skills development and reentry programs run through the Kentucky Career Center and its partner to determine whether or not the digital skills development is included to meet today's skills requirements.
- Partner with state and local agencies to create incentives for businesses to build in or adapt digital skills into training programs.
- Partner with DOC to advance educational programs including WIN, Stride Learning Solutions, FuelEd, Fast Forward, and Digital Literacy.

Strategy 3 (OB6-S3): Expand covered populations' participation in and completion of online targeted-sector training in alignment with Kentucky's economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes.

Actions

- Increase capacity to supplement anchor institutions like libraries, education and training entities and Kentucky Career Centers to support and expand online targeted sector training that includes digital skills. The Kentucky Career Centers currently offer Digital Literacy Courseware and the Digital Literacy Credentials focused on building technology skills needed for success across all careers in Kentucky via the WIN Career Readiness System.
- Integrate digital literacy skill development into reading, math, and English language instruction for adults through Kentucky Adult Education courses. Kentucky Adult Education currently includes digital upskilling as a component of all Integrated Education and Training (IET) and Workplace Literacy programs.
- Work with trusted community partners and educational institutions to encourage digital skills and digital literacy as part of GED

curriculum (or credit hours) rather than stand-alone certificates that support the needs of the covered populations.

- Explore incentives and support for people coming from covered populations who wish to rejoin the workforce. This includes promoting the readily available Work Ready Scholarships available via the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS).
- Partner with the Department of Corrections, through initiatives like Jobs on Day One, to increase the individuals participating in digital skills and literacy programs each year by 2% for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- Partner with Simmons College of Kentucky, Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), Louisville Metro Council, and any other community with a digital inclusion plan to promote their digital inclusion plans and strategies.

Strategy 4 (OB6-S4): Enhance educational outcomes of covered populations through engagement in online learning platforms along the education continuum from preschool to postsecondary (P-20).

Actions

- Explore models such as the "digital backpack" and the positive impact it can have on P-20 (preschool through graduate school) with targeted covered populations.
- Encourage match funding from public and private entities for advancing digital equity, such as the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), private foundation funding, corporate sponsorships, etc.

Strategy 5 (OB6-S5): Positively impact the outcome and equity gaps for covered populations.

Actions

- Partner with the Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services to develop registered apprenticeship programs leading to digital jobs, such as digital navigator, to drive their presence in every county/region.
- Create a digital equity outcomes dashboard that captures the outcomes for covered populations.
- Create clear pathways and incentives to promote remote working, particularly in Eastern Kentucky.
- Encourage employers, industry partnerships and intermediary to develop registered apprenticeship programs sponsorships to develop registered apprenticeship programs for their digital jobs.
- Explore how to partner with WIOA, KTAP and SNAP participants wrap-around support to low-income individuals pursuing digital skills and address any policy issues to combat the benefit cliff.
- Promote best practices by encouraging existing and prospective businesses to hire from covered populations with incentives like the Work Opportunity Tax Credits at the federal level and support for people coming from covered populations who wish to join the workforce.

Strategy 6 (OB6-S6): Increase participation in telehealth services resulting in improved health outcomes of covered populations.

Actions

- Partner with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to promote telehealth services in rural areas.
- Develop maps, data analysis, and other resources to provide health and community-based organizations with supportive technologies.
- Promote the practice of collecting and promoting testimonials of success in managing illness through technology throughout the life of the Digital Equity Act to build interest, engagement, and adoption.

Measuring Success for Objective 6	
Impact Measures	**Output Measures**
Covered Population Success Measure: Increase Kentucky's labor force participation rate by 0.25% beginning in Year 3. ELC/DWD will rely on Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) to track this data. The baseline data for measuring success was established from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) that showed that Kentucky has the 8th lowest labor force participation rate among all states (59.5%).	Successful deployment of digital skills and literacy education platforms through Cabinet opportunities in 24 months. This includes the new initiative for formerly incarcerated individuals, Jobs on Day One. Baseline data will be established after the launch of the program in the first year of capacity grant implementation.
Monitor performance of grant recipients based on longitudinal outcome data.	Based on analysis of the asset inventory instrument, identify gaps in resources.
Track increased usage of Work Opportunity Tax Credits in Kentucky.	Capture the recommendations from facilitated meetings with key partners on digital skills.
Covered Population Success Measure: Improvements in educational outcomes over the five-year grant period tracked by the Kentucky Department of Education. Kentucky's 2023 School Report Card indicated that less than half of students were performing at a proficient or distinguished level in reading in school: • 44% in elementary school; • 45% in middle school and • 47% in high school.	Develop, post, and promote the digital inclusion map on the digital equity website.
Track the number of digital navigators across the state via the asset inventory instrument.	Dedicate a portion of the digital equity website to assessments and resources that will be updated annually.
Covered Population Success Measure: Track the use of telehealth across Kentucky via the Cabinet for Health and Family Services or other publicly available data. Baseline data will be established in the first year of the capacity grant period.	Document programs under the purview of the ELC/DWD that have incorporated digital skills.
Covered Population Success Measure: Attendance rates — track the number of participants who attended the training sessions provided by partners for the programs funded by the ELC/DWD Office of Systems Equity. Baseline data will be established in the first year of the capacity grant period.	Inclusion in the Commonwealth's WIOA state plan for 2024-2028
Establish digital job apprenticeship programs. For example, digital navigator. This will be tracked in partnership with the Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services once the pathway to these apprenticeships is established by year three.	Document leveraged public and private resources to strengthen education outcomes via online learning platforms through state grant funding opportunities.
Develop PSAs and/or other resources in conjunction with CHFS for distribution to community partners that can be broadcast via the Kentucky Educational Television and other media channels.	Create a digital equity outcome dashboard.
Covered Population Success Measure: Expand Prison Education Programs (PEP) for incarcerated individuals from 4 to 10 institutions in accordance with the DOC plan.	
Covered Population Success Measure: Increase the number of GEDs earned by incarcerated individuals annually from 369 to 450 by 2026.	

Engaging Stakeholders to Implement Plan

Stakeholder engagement and collaboration is the key to making this plan work. This plan requires collaboration with state agencies, local communities, community organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other community anchor institutions that are connected and able to act in their communities.

As explained in Section 4.1, this plan was developed with the help of many Kentuckians working together and getting input from interested stakeholders throughout the state. The ELC/DWD plans to rely on these same groups to implement the plan. All the organizations that care about this issue will be invited to join the annual digital inclusion summits, collaborate on promoting various aspects of the implementation strategies, receive frequent updates via newsletters, social media, the digital equity website, participate in the quarterly meeting, and actively help implement the strategy outlined above. ELC/DWD will leverage the Kentucky Digital Equity Summit scheduled in February 2024 to develop more relationships and build even more capacity for implementation of the Digital Equity Plan. Some key stakeholders include:

- Workforce agencies: As indicated in section 2.2 ELC/DWD is the premier workforce cabinet of Kentucky and is either home to critical workforce agencies or collaborates with workforce aligned organizations and other entities. See organization chart in appendices XI and XII.
- The Digital Equity Core Workgroup as described in section 4.1. It will continue to meet to inform the plan implementation strategies and track performance.
- Other government agencies and supporting institutions such as schools, libraries, workforce boards, housing authorities, ADDs, county extension offices, colleges, and universities, will play an important role as digital inclusion stakeholders. See section 4.1 for a comprehensive list of stakeholders.
- Labor organizations such as the Communications Workers of America, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Jefferson County Teachers Association, AFL-CIO, or other labor unions. ELC met with the Communication Workers of America representatives and already held a session at the Kentucky Labor Management Conference around Digital Equity. Additionally, stakeholder engagement with Labor Organizations took place at the 35th annual AFL CIO Convention.
- Nonprofit organizations, including Kentucky Nonprofit Network and other coalitions engaged in education, technical assistance, and sharing best practices, will play a vital role as digital inclusion stakeholders.
- State colleges through the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) including but not limited to four-year college and universities, community colleges, education and training providers, educational service agencies, and County Extension Offices are included in the network of stakeholders that ELC/DWD will work with to build capacity for digital equity. ELC/DWD will also work closely with the two Kentucky-based Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCCUs) Kentucky State University and Simmons College of Kentucky. ELC/DWD will help promote Simmons College of Kentucky's $2.7 million Connecting Minority Communities Grant Program and continues to work with KSU as a part of the Digital Equity Core Workging Group. Additionally, ELC/DWD continues to work with Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) on making available Work Ready Scholarships..

To effectively remain engaged with stakeholders, the ELC/DWD will facilitate the following outreach activities:

- Host an annual Digital Equity Summit to bring together stakeholders to provide updates and solicit input on Kentucky's ongoing activities;
- Host quarterly meetings for key implementation stakeholders;
- Share information via newsletters, email, social media, and website updates, as outlined in the strategies above; and
- Meet with local governments, ISPs, and community leaders to advance digital equity goals and objectives, and recruit champions in Kentucky.

Sustainability

The Kentucky Digital Equity Plan is sustainable because it builds upon the Cabinet's current functions via its agencies, programs, and relationships with

stakeholders that provide essential services to covered populations. As the primary Cabinet charged with overseeing the Department of Workforce Development, which includes several associated agencies and offices such as the Office of Adult Education, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Kentucky Career Center, and the Office of Employer and Apprenticeships Services, as well as the Kentucky Department of Education, the Department of Libraries and Archives, the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS), and Kentucky Education Television, this Cabinet is well-equipped to help bridge the digital divide and promote inclusivity in Kentucky.

With a focus on adaptability in existing and new programs and continuous improvement, the Commonwealth's Digital Equity Plan is poised to withstand the test of time, contributing significantly to a more resilient and inclusive educational and labor environment. Below are some key sustainable objectives with related strategies and actions:

OB1 - Enhance broadband availability and affordability for covered populations.

- ELC/DWD will maintain a relationship with the new Kentucky Office of Broadband Development(OBD) and continue sharing data regarding the covered population generated by KYSTATS. (OB1-S1)
- ELC/DWD will build and maintain a publicly accessible catalog of state and national subsidies on the digital equity website. (OB1-S3)

OB2 - Ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians.

- The plan entails creating a sustainable device ecosystem to give covered populations access to affordable devices. (OB2-S1)
- The plan will explore opportunities with the Registered Apprenticeship program under the Department of Workforce Development's Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services to expand the workforce available to support device refurbishing. (OB2-S2)

OB3- Increase application accessibility and inclusivity to state and local government programs.

- ELC/DWD will leverage the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to address accessibility issues as indicated in the plan and beyond. (OB3-S1)
- ELC/DWD will collaborate with workforce agencies to develop a statewide digital navigator program. This will help support covered populations in accessing government resources and programs online. (OB3-S2)

OB4 - Ensure that all Kentuckians are equipped to navigate the internet safely.

- ELC/DWD will partner with organizations supporting incarcerated and justice-involved individuals, including Goodwill Industries of Kentucky and the Department of Corrections, to encourage pathways to teach digital skills and literacy, including a certificate of completion upon release to assist with re-entry. (OB4-S1)
- ELC/DWD will collaborate with the Kentucky Office of Cybersecurity to identify and/or develop and/or promote best practice resources on internet safety targeting covered populations in their communities. (OB4-S3)

OB5- Improve digital literacy for all covered populations in Kentucky.

- ELC/DWD will leverage agencies within the Department of Workforce Development and community partners to incorporate digital equity into registered apprenticeships, re-entry, and other workforce talent pipelines. (OB5-S2)
- ELC/DWD will build an interactive digital inclusion map so all Kentuckians can find training resources and support nearby. (OB5-S3)

OB6 - Empower all Kentuckians to develop the digital skills necessary for work, life, and civic engagement.

- ELC/DWD will make personal digital skills assessments and certifications available in Kentucky to all who wish to achieve their goals or attain a basic digital skill level. (OB6-S1)
- ELC/DWD will incorporate digital skills training into existing education, training, and workforce development programs.
- ELC/DWD will encourage match funding from public and private entities for advancing digital equity, such as the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), private foundation funding, corporate sponsorships, etc. (OB6-S4)

- ELC/DWD will pursue the inclusion of digital equity in the Commonwealth's WIOA state plan for 2024-2028. (OB6-S5)
- ELC/DWD will promote best practices by encouraging existing and prospective businesses to hire from covered populations with incentives like the Work Opportunity Tax Credits at the federal level and support for people coming from covered populations who wish to join the workforce. (OB6-S5)
- ELC/DWD will partner with the Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services to develop pathways to adopt digital jobs, such as digital navigators, to drive their presence in every county/region. (OB6-S5)

Plan Evaluation

The ELC/DWD will conduct a comprehensive review of the plan after year two and four. This review will provide an opportunity to assess progress, identify any unforeseen obstacles, and recalibrate strategies and actions if necessary. It's a chance to celebrate achievements, learn from setbacks, and stay connected to the bigger picture of the Digital Equity Plan.

5.2 Timeline

Objective	Year	Key Activities and Strategies
Objective 1: Enhance broadband availability and affordability for covered populations.	2024	• Digital Equity Summit in February (S1). • Increase broadband adoption by low-income individuals and individuals residing in rural areas by 2% annually (S4). • Develop an annual report and analysis on access to broadband for covered populations (S1). • Target: 3% increase in ACP participation in targeted counties among low-income individuals and individuals residing in rural areas annually (S4). • Annually track subscription, conversion rates, list growth rates, open rates, and/or engagement by residents (S4). • Annually update catalog of state and national subsidies on Digital Equity website (S3).
	2025	• Continue to annually update catalog of resources on the digital equity website (S3). • Continue to track subscription, conversion rates, list growth rates, open rates, and/or engagement by residents (S4). • Distribute first annual report and analysis on access to broadband for covered populations (S1).
	2026	• Continue to annually update catalog of resources on the digital equity website (S3). • Conduct first longitudinal residential broadband survey (S1). • Assess the impact of and analysis on access to broadband for covered populations the OBD deployment efforts and on areas concentrated by covered populations in the year beginning one year after deployments have begun (S2).
	2027	• Continue to annually update catalog of resources on the digital equity website (S3). • Distribute annual report and analysis on access to broadband for covered populations (S1). • Track participation in low-cost and affordable programs in communities where the ELC/DWD is supporting the promotion of programs in partnership with local entities such as school districts (S2).
	2028	• Continue to annually update catalog of resources on the digital equity website (S3). • Conduct second longitudinal residential broadband survey (S1). • Distribute annual report and analysis on access to broadband for covered populations (S1).
	2029	• Continue to annually update catalog of resources on the digital equity website (S3). • Conduct last longitudinal residential broadband survey (S1). • Distribute annual report and analysis on access to broadband for covered populations (S1).

Objective 2: Ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians.	2024	• Develop a sustainable device ecosystem with the City of Louisville, Simmons College and SOAR that will serve as a model program with expansion within 2 years (S1). • Begin process to track progress in device adoption via three residential surveys conducted at the end of Year 2, 4 and 5 (S1). • Monitor the adoption rates of programs that provide subsidies or discounts on devices and internet services to low-income individuals for continuous improvement (S2).
	2025	• Continue to track the number of new low-cost device programs initiated from Year 2 to 5 (S1). • Continue monitoring the adoption rates of programs that provide subsidies or discounts (S2).
	2026	• Conduct first residential surveys to track device adoption (S2). • Release a best practice report on the “Learn and Earn” program that provides free devices upon successful completion of digital skills training by the end of the year (S3). • Increase the number of GEDs earned by incarcerated individuals annually from 369 to 450 by 2026 (S2).
	2027	• Evaluate the impact of government and private-sector initiatives aimed at improving device ownership in underserved communities (S1). • Continue monitoring the adoption rates of programs that provide subsidies or discounts (S2).
	2028	• Conduct second residential surveys to track device adoption (S2). • Continue monitoring the adoption rates of programs that provide subsidies or discounts (S2).
	2029	• Conduct last residential surveys to track device adoption (S2). • Continue monitoring the adoption rates of programs that provide subsidies or discounts (S2).

Objective 3: Increase application accessibility and inclusivity to state and local government programs.	2024	• Focus on increasing enrollment, participation, and engagement rates in critical state-run programs annually for individuals with disabilities and with a language barrier over the five-year period (S2). • Create a playbook for civic and social engagement (S4). • Develop assessment tool to understand what drives increased enrollment, participation, and engagement in critical state-run programs (S3). • Promote the advancement of the 211-referral hotline in partnership with the Public Service Commission over the five-year plan period (S5). • Conduct annual interviews with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders serving individuals with language barriers (S1). • Track remote job employment rates annually for individuals with disabilities over the five-year period (S1).
	2025	• Develop an annual customer satisfaction survey (in partnership with other agencies) that includes accessibility and publish results that will be used for continuous improvement (S4). • Annually request accessibility studies on critical state-run programs (S1). • Continue to track remote job employment rates annually for individuals with disabilities (S3). • Convene covered population round tables with state and local emergency management entities as requested (S5).
	2026	• Continue conducting annual interviews with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders serving individuals with language barriers (S1). • Complete accessibility study and partner with state programs to address outcomes (S3). • First deployment of the assessment tool developed to understand what drives increased enrollment, participation, and engagement in critical state-run programs (S1). • During Years 2 to 5 distribute the playbook/resource to community organizations (S4).
	2027	• Continue to track remote job employment rates annually for individuals with disabilities (S1). • Continue conducting annual interviews with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders (S4). • Second deployment of the assessment tool developed to understand what drives increased enrollment, participation, and engagement in critical state-run programs (S1).
	2028	• Continue to track remote job employment rates annually for individuals with disabilities (S1). • Continue conducting annual interviews with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders (S4). • Finalize and present data from the tool developed to understand what drives increased enrollment, participation, and engagement in critical state-run programs (S1).
	2029	• Continue to track remote job employment rates annually for individuals with disabilities (S1). • Continue conducting annual interviews with lived experts, digital equity and inclusivity stakeholders (S4).

Objective 4: Ensure that all Kentuckians are equipped to navigate the internet safely.	2024	• In partnership with community stakeholders, develop PSAs and/or marketing strategies to promote internet safety courses (S2). • Update the digital equity website with the identified resources on a semi-annual basis (S1). • Develop the visual placard/aid materials for distribution in cooperation with community partners (S2). • Track use of cybersecurity resources and online tools shared via the ELC/DWD's digital equity website (S1).
	2025	• Track performance of Digital Equity PSAs by tracking the number of stations airing them, the total number of airings, the total value of those airings, and total impressions (S2).
	2026	• Begin an initial assessment of internet safety barriers via the three residential surveys to be conducted in Year 2, 4 and 5 of the Digital Equity Plan (S3).
	2027	• Continue to track use of cybersecurity resources and online tools shared via the ELC/DWD's digital equity website (S1). • Track the number of justice-involved (formerly incarcerated) individuals who successfully complete training on a quarterly basis (S3).
	2028	• Second assessment of internet safety barriers via the residential survey (S3).
	2029	• Final assessment of internet safety barriers via the residential survey (S3).
Objective 5: Improve digital literacy for all covered populations in Kentucky.	2024	• Define digital literacy in the Commonwealth (S1). • Longitudinal studies of the digital inclusion inventory (S3). • Development of an inventory of success stories that highlight local lived experiences (S4). • Establishment and adoption of a framework around digital citizenship within the first 12 months of the program (S1).
	2025	• Create the roll out strategy with key partners (S2). • Develop of an inventory of key community-based organizations and stakeholders that offer core skills/certifications and best practices (S2).
	2026	• Incorporate digital literacy certifications in the Commonwealth's Learning Employment Records (LERs) initiative (S2). • First assessment of digital literacy levels of veterans and aging individuals via the residential surveys (S4).
	2027	• Re-evaluate the inventory of key community-based organizations and stakeholders that offer core skills/certifications and best practices (S2).
	2028	• Second assessment of digital literacy levels of veterans and aging individuals via the residential surveys (S4).
	2029	• Final assessment of digital literacy levels of veterans and aging individuals via the residential surveys (S4).

Objective 6: Kentuckians develop the digital skills necessary for work and life.	2024	• Initiate the means to increase Kentucky's labor force participation rate by 0.25% beginning in Year 3 (S2). • Develop, post, and promote the digital inclusion map on the digital equity website (S5). • Assess changes in educational outcomes over the five-year grant period (S2). • Ensure inclusion in the Commonwealth's WIOA state plan for 2024-2028 (S2).
	2025	• Dedicate a portion of the digital equity website to assessments and resources that will be updated annually (S5). • Initiate successful deployment of digital skills and literacy education platforms through Cabinet opportunities (S2). • Begin tracking usage of Work Opportunity Tax Credits at the federal level (S2).
	2026	• Establish digital job apprenticeship programs. For example, digital navigator (S3). • Continue to assess changes in educational outcomes (S2). • Develop PSAs and/or other resources in conjunction with CHFS for distribution to community partners (S6). • Increase the number of GEDs earned by incarcerated individuals annually from 369 to 450 by 2026.
	2027	• Track the number of digital navigators across the state via the asset inventory instrument (S5). • Verify an increase in Kentucky's labor force participation rate of 0.25% over previous data (S2).
	2028	• Re-evaluate further DE inclusion in the Commonwealth's WIOA state plan beyond 2028 (S2).
	2029	• Finalize DE Impact report to assess changes in educational outcomes (S4).

6 Conclusion

Kentucky's vision to be a place where all individuals, businesses, and communities have full and equitable digital access to pursue economic and personal opportunities is achievable within the next five years as outlined in this plan. The reality is that access to affordable, reliable broadband — and the devices and knowledge to utilize it — are necessities for everyone to fully engage in modern society. The passage of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in November 2021, including the Digital Equity Act, brought new opportunities to achieve true digital equity for all. This Kentucky Digital Equity Plan has been created as a result of those new opportunities. Kentucky has engaged with stakeholders from across the state to help create this plan and it will take collaboration among many individuals, nonprofits, companies, cities, communities, business, labor organizations, ISPs and many more across the Commonwealth to ensure this vision for Kentucky will be realized.

Appendix I.
KY Digital Equity Plan Crosswalk with State Digital Equity Plan Requirements

#	NOFO Requirement	Eligible Entity Plan – Reference Location (i.e., page number)	Notes
Statutory Requirements			
1	Identification of barriers to digital equity faced by Covered Populations in the State.	3.2.1: Barriers to Covered Populations, Adoption, and Affordability. Pages 36-45	
2	Measurable objectives for documenting and promoting, among each Covered Population located in that State— a. The availability of, and affordability of access to, fixed and wireless broadband technology; b. The online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services; c. Digital literacy; d. Awareness of, and the use of, measures to secure the online privacy of, and cybersecurity with respect to, an individual; and e. The availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support for those devices.	1: Executive Summary – Pages 2-9 5.1: Implementation – Pages 50-66	Pages 6-9 show measurable objectives specific to covered populations Pages 52-66 show a comprehensive list
3	An assessment of how the measurable objectives identified in item 2 of this Section IV.C.1.b.i will impact and interact with the State's— a. Economic and workforce development goals, plans, and outcomes; b. Educational outcomes; c. Health outcomes; d. Civic and social engagement; and e. Delivery of other essential services.	2.2: Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes – Pages 13-23 5.1: Implementation, Objectives 1-6 – Pages 50-63	ELC oversees most of the relevant agencies, so this interaction is built into their operations Objective 6 is designed to meet this requirement. It impacts economic and work development goals, plans and outcomes, educational outcomes, health outcomes, and civic and social engagement. Page 63 Objective 3 is designed to improve the delivery of essential services for individuals with disabilities and language barriers. Pages 56-58

4	In order to achieve the measurable objectives identified in item 2 of this Section IV.C.1.b.i, a description of how the State plans to collaborate with key stakeholders in the State, which may include— a. Community anchor institutions; b. County and municipal governments; c. Local educational agencies; d. Where applicable, Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, or Native Hawaiian organizations; e. Nonprofit organizations; f. Organizations that represent— i. Individuals with disabilities, including organizations that represent children with disabilities; ii. Aging Individuals; iii. Individuals with language barriers, including—(1) Individuals who are English learners; and (2) Individuals who have low levels of literacy; iv. Veterans; and v. Individuals in that State who are incarcerated in facilities other than Federal correctional facilities; g. Civil rights organizations; h. Entities that carry out workforce development programs; i. Agencies of the State that are responsible for administering or supervising adult education and literacy activities in the State; j. Public housing authorities in the State; and k. A partnership between any of the entities described in clauses (a) through (l)	4.1: Coordination and Outreach Strategy – Pages 46-50	
5	A list of organizations with which the Administering Entity for the State collaborated in developing the Plan.	4.1: Maintaining Collaborations for Plan Implementation - Pages 48-50 Appendix III	
Additional Requirements			
1	A stated vision for digital equity.	2.1.1: Vision for Kentucky – Page 11	

2	A digital equity needs assessment, including a comprehensive assessment of the baseline from which the State is working and the State's identification of the barriers to digital equity faced generally and by each of the covered populations in the State.	3.2: Needs Assessment – Pages 31-36 3.2.1: Covered Populations – Pages 36-46 3.2.1: Barriers for Covered Populations, Adoption, and Affordability – Pages 36-46	
3	An asset inventory, including current resources, programs, and strategies that promote digital equity for each covered population, whether publicly or privately funded, as well as existing digital equity plans and programs already in place among municipal, regional, and Tribal governments.	3.1: Asset Inventory Pages 23-26 Appendix II	The comprehensive list is found in Appendix II
4	To the extent not addressed in connection with item 4 of Section IV.C.1.b.i, a coordination and outreach strategy, including opportunities for public comment by, collaboration with, and ongoing engagement with representatives of each category of covered populations within the State and with the full range of stakeholders within the State.	4.1: Coordination and Outreach Strategy - Pages 46-50	Addressed in the latter half of 4.1
5	A description of how municipal, regional, and/or Tribal digital equity plans will be incorporated into the State Digital Equity Plan.	3.1.2/3.1.3: Incorporation of Local, Municipal, and Regional Digital Equity Plans – Pages 24-27	
6	An implementation strategy that is holistic and addresses the barriers to participation in the digital world, including affordability, devices, digital skills, technical support, and digital navigation. The strategy should (a) establish measurable goals, objectives, and proposed core activities to address the needs of covered populations, (b) set out measures ensuring the plan's sustainability and effectiveness across State communities, and (c) adopt mechanisms to ensure that the plan is regularly evaluated and updated.	5.1: Implementation strategy – Pages 50-66	
7	An explanation of how the implementation strategy addresses gaps in existing state, local, and private efforts to address the barriers identified pursuant to Section IV.C.1.b.i, item 1, of this NOFO.	5.1: Implementation Strategy and Key Activities – Pages 50-66 2.2: Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes – Pages 13-23	Each measurable objective identifies specific gaps being addressed by the objective and related strategies/actions

8	A description of how the State intends to accomplish the implementation strategy described above by engaging or partnering with: a. Workforce agencies such as state workforce agencies and state/local workforce boards and workforce organizations; b. Labor organizations and community-based organizations; and c. Institutions of higher learning, including but not limited to four-year colleges and universities, community colleges, education and training providers, and educational service agencies;	5.1: Engaging Stakeholders to Implement Plan – Page 64	The latter part of 5.1
9	A timeline for implementation of the plan.	5.2: Timeline – Pages 66-70	
10	A description of how the State will coordinate its use of State Digital Equity Capacity Grant funding and its use of any funds it receives in connection with the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program, other federal or private digital equity funding.	2.2: Coordinating with the Kentucky Office of Broadband Development – Pages 21-22	The latter part of 2.2 Aligning Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan with State Goals and Coordinating with the Kentucky Office of Broadband Development

Appendix II. Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory

Organization Name	Asset Name	Description	Covered Population(s) Served
Amped	Russell Station Technology and Learning Center	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Digital skills development	Persons of color, Low-income
AT&T	Public Library Association Collaboration on ACP and Digital Learning; Connected Learning Centers; Achievery by AT&T; ACCESS (Low-Cost BB Offer w/ ACP); Somali Community Center of Louisville; Blue Star Families; Laptop; Contributions to Backside Learning Center at Churchill and to Hindman Settlement School	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Individuals with a language barrier
Ballard Telephone Cooperative (BTC)	ACP	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income
Ballard-Carlisle County Public Library	Wi-Fi access	Wi-Fi accessibility 24 hours	Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Women
Big Sandy Community and Technical College/KCTCS	Big Sandy Community and Technical College (BSCTC) online educational programs and support for college students.	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification). It provides direct instruction in digital literacy and hosts workforce training programs with digital inclusion elements for the community. Additionally, through grants and special programs, BSCTC offers summer programs to enhance technology and digital skills for local youth, creating a career pathway for the region. In 2022, the college upgraded its technology infrastructure on all campuses, boosting speed and connectivity with wireless access points. BSCTC is dedicated to leveraging technology to support students and the community, ensuring they have the necessary skills for success in the digital age.	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, other

Bluegrass Local Workforce Development Area	Kentucky Career Center - Bluegrass	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy.	Aging individuals (age 60+), Low-income
Boyd County Public Library	Public access computers	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women
Boyle County Public Library	N/A	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital tech support, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	other
Campbell County Public Library	Talking Tech Troubles, One on One Computer Help, outreach to seniors through YMCA and senior center	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Low-income
Carl D. Perkins Job Corps Center	Carl D. Perkins Job Corps Center	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy	Low-income
CDPVTC	Internet access programs	Basic awareness of online safety	Individuals with disabilities

Center for Rural Development	Center for Rural Development Broadband Program	The Center for Rural Development has launched a Technology Assistance Program (TAP) to help communities begin asset mapping, perform feasibility studies, and conduct pre-engineering analyses of community fiber projects or other activities that will extend the reach of the KentuckyWired fiber infrastructure. The initiative is funded by grant KY-18984-17 from the Appalachian Regional Commission and is administered by The Center for Rural Development. The Center has additional information about local, state, and federal funds that support the initiative to bring broadband access to rural areas. The Center is dedicated to helping communities explore ways to become "fiber ready", in order to make reliable high-speed, high-capacity internet available to as many people as possible. The mission of The Center is to positively impact the communities within 45 counties of southern and eastern Kentucky, through supporting the implementation of KentuckyWired infrastructure.	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
City of Hopkinsville, KY	Information Technology Department	Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	other
Community Action Council for Lexington-Fayette, Bourbon, Harrison and Nicholas Counties, inc.	CAC programs	We offer various programs including CDA, CDL and CNA courses, Emergency Rental Assistance Program (Fayette County), Head Start programs (17 counties), LiHEAP, statewide programs through Adult Protective Services/Child Protective Services and other services.	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Connected Nation	Connected Nation Digital Literacy & Learning (DLL) Workshops	Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Indigenous persons or Native Americans, Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)

Council on Postsecondary Education	Kentucky Virtual Library	On the Virtual Library's website, students can search for articles, research specific topics or browse well-known titles, such as Scholastic GO! and Encyclopedia Britannica. Materials are available for students at all levels – from elementary grades through college and beyond, including adult learners, those entering the job market and those studying in health care.	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Crittenden County Public Library	Crittenden County Public Library	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, other
Crossroads Broadband of Kentucky	It doesn't have an official name.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content	Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities
Cynthiana-Harrison County Public Library	Mobile Hot Spots and Chromebooks for Checkout	Access to internet-enabled devices	Low-income
Daviess County Public Library	Public Internet Access Program, Tech Training, Mobile Hotspot Lending, and ECF	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content	Low-income
Digital Works	Digital Works	The Digital Works program delivers grant-funded, live, virtual, digital skills and customer service training, and individualized career readiness support (resume, cover letter, interviewing, job application) focused on the unique characteristics of confidently and safely applying for and securing a work-from-home job. Participants engage as a group in a virtual environment utilizing remote communication tools while they upskill/refresh important skills needed to succeed. The program places a special emphasis on military-connected participants (veterans, spouses, and transitioning service members). Military-connected adults face unique challenges related to employment including frequent moves, the need for flexibility due to service commitments, living in rural areas that may have limited options for career growth and life-altering transitions. Remote employment is a solution that can offer flexibility, portability, and career continuity.	Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)

DUO Broadband	ACP	Access to reliable and affordable internet	other
Eastern Telephone & Technologies	We are currently working with several communities to assist them with the implementation of broadband in their area (some are municipalities, some are entire counties). At present we do not have a specific name for a specific area as we are in the beginning stages for several areas.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, other	other
Education and Labor Cabinet	Kentucky Career Center	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content	Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, other
Esperanza Latino Center of NKY	1. Esperanza Computer Training 2. Bilingual Service-Desk ACP Assistance	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content	Persons of color, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Estill County Public Library	City of Hopkinsville, KY	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Digital financial literacy	Low-income
Fahe	Our Member organizations do a variety of digital literacy courses, and actively enroll individuals in the Affordable Connectivity Program. Many of our Member organizations, who live and work in rural areas, see the importance of expanding internet access to remote areas.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content	Our organization primarily focuses on low-income, rural individuals.
Fayette County Cooperative Extension	unsure	Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy	Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women
Fayette County Public Schools	Fayette County Public Schools Free Wi-Fi Program	Free hotspot for families with no internet access at home, allowing kids to access virtual learning.	Low-income
Feeding America Kentucky's Heartland	N/A	other	other

Gallatin County Public Library	Mobile Hotspot Loaning	Access to internet-enabled devices	Low-income
George Coon Public Library	George Coon Public Library	Use of applications and online content	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income
Goodwill Industries of Kentucky	Goodwill Opportunity Centers	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Goodwill Industries of Kentucky	Basics of Computers; Applied Digital Skills; RISE; Good Start;	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Goodwill Industries of Kentucky	I'm not sure I understand the question, but Goodwill Industries of Kentucky has a career pathway called "Applied Digital Skills". This is a self-paced program including 5 modules each client has to watch and submit homework to Goodwill. Upon completion and all homework has been submitted, it will be graded, and the client can receive a new chrome book. The clients who do not pass the first time are coached until their scores are acceptable.	Digital literacy training, Digital financial literacy	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Goodwill Industries of Kentucky	RISE (Reintegrating Individuals Successfully Everyday)	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women

Goodwill Industries of Kentucky	Goodwill Opportunity Center	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital literacy training, Digital financial literacy	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Goodwill Industries of Kentucky-Somerset Opportunity Center	Absolute Basics of Computers, North Star Digital Literacy (Basics of Computes, Internet Basics, Using Email, Windows 10) GFC Learn, Google Applied Digital Skills, TABE Testing. Sending emails in the workplace.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Basic awareness of online safety. We assist individuals who reside in rural areas at the Somerset Opportunity center. Our mission is to serve folks with disabilities and other disadvantages such as but not limited to (individuals in recovery, homeless etc.). We serve low-income households and work directly with incarcerated clients. Goodwill partners with Google and North Star Digital literacy to promote digital inclusion. Google provides Chrome Books to clients who complete Applied Digital Skills.	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families
Goodwill Industries of KY	RISE	Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy	Those in recovery and transitional housing. Coming out of prison.
Goodwill Industries of KY	Elizabethtown Opportunity Center	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy	Persons of color, Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women
Goodwill Industries of KY -Pikeville Opportunity Center	Pikeville Opportunity Center	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	Persons of color, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women

Goodwill of Kentucky	Opportunity Center	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Goodwill of Kentucky Opportunity Center - Corbin, KY	Absolute Basic of Computers (ABCs) - Basic of Computers - Internet Basics - Using Email - Computer Assessment Applied Digital Skills (ADS) - Use Google to Get a New Job - Use Digital Tools for Everday Tasks - Send Emails in the Workplace Northstar Digital Literacy GCF Learn TABE testing	The Corbin Opportunity Center serves individuals with disabilities and other disadvantages, such as, but not limited to: low-income, homeless, incarcerated individuals and their families, individuals in recovery and individuals that reside in a rural area. “Goodwill Industries of Kentucky partners with Google and Northstar to promote digital inclusion. The partnership affords individuals the opportunity to earn a Chromebook through completion of lessons.”	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families
Green County Public Library	Green County Public Library internet and device assistance programs	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Use of applications and online content	Low-income
Inspire 1	Project Connect. We have locations at Shawnee Community Center located at 607 S. 37th Street and are in the process of opening a second location at 1875 Farnsley Road, Louisville, KY 40216.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Persons of color, Aging individuals (age 60+), Low-income
International Union of Operating Engineers Local 181	IUOE LOCAL 181 Digital Inclusion Training for Veterans	Digital inclusion training programs for local veterans	Veterans
J.U. Kevil Memorial Foundation, Inc.	Day Training for individuals with disabilities who have been accepted for services.	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development	Individuals with disabilities

Jackson County Public Library	Laptop/Hotspot Lending Program Check out a Librarian - Tech Support Bookmobile Outreach Services	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women
Jessamine County Public Library	JCPL One-to-One Computer Help	Free in-person computer skills classes as well as one-to-one computer help.	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Jessamine County Public Library	Library Services including: Public Computers; Public Wireless; Public HotSpot Circulation; Research training; Job and Career Training and more.	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development, other	Low-income
Johnson County Public Library	Various programs offer these services	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Women, other
Kennedy Individualized Community Services, LLC	Kennedy Individualized Community Services (Adult Foster Care)	other	other

Kentucky Assistive Technology Services Network	KATS Network Disability Solutions Through Technology	KATS has a reutilization program, CARAT, that collects, refurbishes, and redistributes assistive technology (AT) and durable medical equipment (DME). The KATS network of lending library programs offers individuals the opportunity to borrow AT short-term and allows individuals to list their own items for sale/giveaway. Kentuckians can visit the KY Assistive Technology Locator website to see the equipment currently available. KATS AT Demonstration Centers provide a place for people of all ages and disabilities, their family members/caregivers as well as educators, healthcare providers, and other professionals to see, learn about, and try out the latest AT. The KATS Network operates a statewide information and referral system, providing individuals with information on a wide range of AT and disability-related programs and services. KATS also provides public awareness, training, and technical assistance.	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
Kentucky Business Enterprises	Kentucky Business Enterprise	Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Women
Kentucky Financial Empowerment Commission	Financial Literacy Education	Use of applications and online content, Digital financial literacy. “We partner with Kentucky Guardianship Association, UK Human Institute, DB101, STABLE Kentucky, and Synergies Work to provide information and resources to individuals with disabilities. We partner with the members of the Kentucky Financial Empowerment Coalition to empower and educate. Coalition members include a long list of community and business leaders throughout the state. We partner with Bank On Kentucky Coalition to increase account access for individuals and businesses and provide free financial literacy education in-person and online to improve financial situations.”	Indigenous persons or Native Americans, Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier

Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation	AHEAD grant. This grant from the USDA Rural Innovative Placemaking Challenge has KHIC and partners identifying and removing the barriers for residents in multi-family public housing to access broadband. It covers Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Leslie, Letcher, Perry, and Whitley Counties. There are 122 campuses.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, other	Low-income, other
Kentucky Office of Adult Education	Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE)	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
Kentucky Office of Adult Education	Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE)	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier, other
Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	I am not sure.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices	other
Kentucky OVR	Kentucky OVR	Use of applications and online content, other	Individuals with disabilities
Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children Inc	Face to face, computer (zoom), emails, phone calls	Digital skills development, other	Indigenous persons or Native Americans, Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier

KY Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Telecommunication Access Program and Deaf Access Station	Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content	Individuals with disabilities, Incarcerated adults and their families, Individuals with a language barrier. Our program specifically targets individuals with hearing loss but many of those also fit into the populations listed above. However, we do not collect that data.
KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Individuals with disabilities
KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices	Individuals with disabilities
KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	KY Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Access to internet-enabled devices	Individuals with disabilities
KY OVR	We partner with the TENCO Kentucky Career Center and sometimes have our consumers without wi-fi or computer access use their resource room.	other	Individuals with disabilities
LCADD	Grant services	other	Incarcerated adults and their families
LCADD	Grant services	other	Incarcerated adults and their families
Lewis County Public Library	Access to Internet	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Basic awareness of online safety	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income
Lexington Public Library	Lexington Public Library Career and Job Resources	Video courses to learn computer basics, navigating the internet, and using popular software programs. Achieve basic to advanced skills in word processing, creating spreadsheets and databases, implementing design and more.	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other

Life Learning	Life Learning Center	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	Indigenous persons or Native Americans, Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Life Learning Center	NA	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women
LifeSkills	Prevention and Outreach services	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities
LLC	Life Learning Center	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	other
Louisville Free Public Library	Louisville Free Public Library Computer Classes	Computer and digital skills classes	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
Louisville Free Public Library	Free Loaned Public Hot Spots	Access to internet-enabled devices. We provide English conversation meetings for those who want to learn the English language.The Metro Housing Authority has a program that revitalizes our surplus equipment and provides computers to participants in need. Along with the Coalition for the Homeless.	Indigenous persons or Native Americans, Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Women, Individuals with a language barrier

Louisville Metro Government	Louisville Digital Inclusion Plan	Louisville Metro is using the Digital Inclusion Plan to pursue the city's larger strategic planning goals for the region related to jobs, education, and being a more compassionate city. From the plan: "Whether applying for a job, doing homework, or starting a business, all of our residents need digital skills, tools, and connectivity."	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
Louisville Metro Government	Digital Inclusion pathways	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital literacy training, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Louisville Metro Housing Authority	Thrive Program	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Digital skills development	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Louisville Metro Office of Resilience and Community Services	Bank On Louisville	Access to reliable and affordable internet	Low-income
Lousville Metro Housing Authority	Louisville Metro Housing Authority Affordable Connectivity Program	information about internet services	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
Lyon County Public Library	One-on-One digital help	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	other

Marion County Public Library	The library offers free internet access to anyone inside and outside our building; we also offer free access to internet-enabled devices. Library staff offer help to patrons (as needed) with navigating public assistance sites/ portals and other government and job-seeking sites. The library does have an online use policy that outlines basic digital literacy and online safety protocols.	Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women
Marshall County Public Library	Public internet-access computers; Free Wi-Fi (24/7 with parking lot access); Hotspot lending	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development	Individuals with disabilities
McCreary County Public Library	McCreary County Public Library internet access and use programs	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, other	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area
McLean County Public LIbrary	McLean County Public Library internet programs	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices. We offer free wi-fi service as well as 16 public accessible computers	Low-income
Meals on Wheels Southwest OH and Northern KY	Meals on Wheels Southwest OH and Northern KY Virtual Senior Center and Digital Connect	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Low-income, Women
Metro United Way	We do not provide a program that offers digital inclusion. During the pandemic we supported several agencies that were working to ensure organizations and households were able to support children and youth in participating in NTI. We have also been a part of convening community partners around exploring strategies and the opportunity to develop a collective impact model to addressing this need.	other	other

Metro United Way	MUW provided a 2-year funding opportunity (open RFP) to community organizations to apply that are focusing on Basic Needs services, which we define as including digital inclusion services. At least one proposal was selected for funding, and will continue receiving MUW funding until 2024.	other	other
Mountain Telephone	Mountain Rural Telephone Cooperative, Inc	Access to reliable and affordable internet	Individuals who reside in a rural area
Muhlenberg County Public Libraries	Muhlenberg County Public Library one-on-one computer training and internet assistance programs	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Murray State University	MSU Information Systems, Cybersecurity	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Veterans, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Northern Kentucky University	Cinsam, Governor's Scholars, InterAlliance, Seminars and Conferences.	Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
Northern Ky Community Action Commission	We are currently interested in partnering to add digital inclusion into our list of services	Access to reliable and affordable internet	Persons of color, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income

Office of Adult Education, Education & Labor Cabinet	Office of Adult Education	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content	Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development	Individuals with disabilities
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Access to internet-enabled devices	Individuals with disabilities
Pathways Inc.	The program that I am a participant/employee of with Pathways Inc (www.Pathways-Ky-org) is IPS Supported Employment but I am not 100% if we are offering digital inclusion services. Perhaps we are as that may be why I received this email initially.	other	Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women
Pom-Derosa Poms	T Mobile	other	other
Red Bird Mission	Red Bird Region Broadband Action Team and Seniors4Seniors	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women
Rockcastle County Public Library	Rockcastle County Public Library public access computers and wi-fi; Girls Who Code classes	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Use of applications and online content, Other	Aging individuals (age 60+), Low-income, other
Rocky Hollow Rec Center	Rocky Hollow Rec Center internet access program	Access to internet-enabled devices	Aging individuals (age 60+)
Rowan County Public Library	Library Services including Hotspots	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area

Russell County Public Library	The Achieve Network	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Ethnic_minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
Shaping Our Appalachian Region	EKY Office of Digital Equity	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators), Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
Shultz Career Consulting	N/A - We help disabled individuals find jobs online.	Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content	Individuals with disabilities
SOAR (Shaping Our Appalachian Region)	SOAR (Shaping Our Appalachian Region) Office of Digital Equity	SOAR founded the Eastern Kentucky Office of Digital Literacy to help every resident: Use the internet to find remote jobs; Participate in local and community events; Take steps to improve their health through Telehealth; Access education and career training; Improve one's lifestyle by being able to "connect" with friends and family virtually	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income
Somali Community of Louisville Inc	COMPUTER CLASSES We offer a variety of entry level and intermediate computer classes on topics ranging from: Email Basics Cybersecurity Internet Basics Video calling Basics Microsoft Basics Financial literacy Computer technical skills, productivity software, and how to navigate social media. TAKING COMPUTER CLASSES AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER. We hold our computer classes in our center. Most of our classes last one hour to ninety minutes. They're designed to be hands-on and last for one session. Feel free to repeat a class to improve your skills.	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Individuals with a language barrier

Southcentral Community and Technical College	Digital Literacy courses within Adult Education	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Basic awareness of online safety	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Veterans, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
Southwest Center	Southwest Center for the Developmentally Disabled	Access to internet-enabled devices	Persons of color, Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals with disabilities, Individuals with a language barrier
Spencer County Public Library	Check Out the Internet: Mobile Hotspots	Check Out the Internet: Mobile Hotspots available for check out with a library card that provides households with internet access for 5 devices."; Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development (e.g., Programming, Cybersecurity certification)	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income
St. Vincent Mission	Career-Readiness Program	Access to internet-enabled devices	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Women
TANK	Our transit operations serve all functions of the economy as it applies to transportation. We have free WiFi on all our buses and provide transportation access to dozens of resources in Northern Kentucky.	Access to reliable and affordable internet (e.g., ACP sign ups), Access to internet-enabled devices, other	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
TDS Telecom	TDS is providing a low-income service, TDS Connects, participates in the ACP / free WI-FI, web video on enrolling in the ACP, offering free 1Gig service to one anchor institution in each service area and post grant training programs..	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income
TENCO Workforce Development Board	WIOA Title I Adult, DW, Youth	Access to internet-enabled devices, Use of applications and online content	Low-income

The United Way of the Pennyrile	We do not provide direct services to individuals. We fund 18 partner agencies that have their own programs.	other	other
Trimble County Public Library	Public Access Computer program Public Wi-Fi program Hotspot and Chromebook lending program	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support (e.g., Digital Navigators)	Veterans
Trimble County Public Library	General library services	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area
United Way of East Kentucky	We provide grants to agencies in our area. We do not offer digital inclusion services.	other	other
United Way of Greater Cincinnati	United Way of Greater Cincinnati's NKY Digital Equity Initiative for Students	free internet; technology for students	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency), other
United Way of Greater Cincinnati	Community Connections	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital tech support	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
United Way of South Central Kentucky	N/A	other	other
United Way of Western Kentucky	We don't offer a program from digital inclusion.	other	other

Unity Allies	Unity Allies provides educate. There is not a specific program name for the service. We tailor our workshops and educational services based on the specific needs of the client.	Digital financial literacy, other	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Incarcerated adults and their families, Women, Individuals with a language barrier
University of Kentucky	University of Kentucky Digital Inclusion Services	The University of Kentucky (UK) offers a variety of programs that offer digital inclusion services. Many of these programs are interlaced into the fabric of how the University serves our campus community - students, faculty, and staff - and how we make some of those services readily available to the broader Kentucky community. Below is a link to one example of what this looks like at UK. https://smartcampus.uky.edu/	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier (e.g., limited English proficiency)
University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service	University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Digital Literacy Program	Through Cooperative Extension programs in 120 counties within the state we have the capability of providing digital literacy education to the general public based upon various areas of expertise and community need (ie agriculture production, financial management, consumer decision making, youth leadership, etc). We have provided "Essentials of Community Cybersecurity" and "Community Preparedness for Cyber Incidents" trainings to community leaders. Additionally we offer specialized Extension based online training "Get Qualified for Remote Work" to increase the skill sets of rural residents to be successful remote workers where adequate broadband is available.	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women
University of Kentucky Extension - Cumberland	We offer free Wi-Fi	Use of applications and online content	Individuals who reside in a rural area

University of Louisville	University of Louisville	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital financial literacy, Digital skills development	other
University of Louisville Trager Institute Optimal Aging Clinic	We provide a variety of programs and services including primary care and behavioral health care. We a telehealth option to patient who receive primary and behavioral healthcare at the Trager Institute Optimal Aging Clinic. We also provide a Virtual Friendly Visitor Program which uses technology to connect the FV volunteer and older adult participant. We offer evidence-based health education intervention virtually as well as health education classes. The Trager Institute also engages in workforce development engaging hundreds of students every year in practicum placements and training and education. These trainings are done virtually including training offered to the community. We offer a Project ECHO training model that reaches across the state virtually. We offer an Interdisciplinary Case Management Experience that is provided virtually.	Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area
Vocational Rehabilitation	Unsure	other	Individuals with disabilities
Vocational Rehabilitation	Consumers have the capability of signing our applications and other paperwork electronically.	other	Individuals with disabilities
Warren County Public Library	Read and Feed	Access to internet-enabled devices	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Women, Individuals with a language barrier

Wayne County Cooperative Extension Service	Soil Testing Program Private Applicator certification Beef Quality Assurance and Care Pest Identification and control recommendations E-Extension X10D	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Digital literacy training, Use of applications and online content	Aging individuals (age 60+), Individuals who reside in a rural area, Low-income, Women
Western Kentucky University	WKU digital inclusion services	Services provided to members of the WKU community ranging from academic programs to support services provided by the operational side of the house.	Persons of color, Ethnic minorities, Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women
William B Harlan Memorial Library	Wm B Harlan Library programs and services	Access to reliable and affordable internet, Access to internet-enabled devices, Digital literacy training, Digital tech support, Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, Digital skills development	Aging individuals (age 60+), Veterans, Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, Low-income, Women
Zoom Group, Inc.	Virtual Job Shadowing, Peer Mentoring and Self Advocacy for individuals w/disabilities.	Use of applications and online content, Basic awareness of online safety, other	Individuals who reside in a rural area, Individuals with disabilities, other

Appendix III. Kentucky Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Community Outreach Listening Session	2/14/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Pennyville ADD (Area Development District) 300 Hammond Dr. Hopkinsville, KY 42240	Regional Listening Session	30	X	X	X	X				
Community Outreach Listening Session	2/16/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Purchase ADD, 1002 Medical Dr. Mayfield, KY 42066	Regional Listening Session	17								
Community Outreach Listening Session	2/21/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Green River ADD 300 Gradd Way, Owensboro, KY 42301	Regional Listening Session	49								
Community Outreach Listening Session	2/23/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Lincoln Trail ADD 613 College St. Rd. Elizabethtown, KY 42701	Regional Listening Session	20	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Community Outreach Listening Session	2/24/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	The Jeffersonian 10617 Taylorsville Rd. Jeffersontown, KY 40299	Regional Listening Session	26	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Outreach Listening Session	2/28/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Barren River ADD 177 Graham Ave, Bowling Green, KY 42101	Regional Listening Session	32	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/1/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Lake Cumberland ADD 2384 Lakeway Dr. Russell Springs, KY 42642	Regional Listening Session	23	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/7/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Kentucky River ADD 941 North Main St. Hazard, KY 41701	Regional Listening Session	30	X	X		X	X			X

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/8/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Cumberland Valley ADD 342 Old Whitley Rd. London, KY 40744	Regional Listening Session	20	X	X		X	X		X	X
Meeting with Colby Hall and Lizzie Gillum intro to digital navigator activities	3/9/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Education & Labor Cabinet 500 Mero Str. Frankfort, KY 40106	Stakeholders	1								
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/13/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Mountain Arts Center 50 Hal Rogers Dr. Prestonsburg, KY 41653	Regional Listening Session	20	X	X		X	X	X		X
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Goodwill Resource Center 909 E. Broadway, Louisville, KY 40204	Covered Populations	3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Louisville Housing Authority 735 Eastern Pkwy, Louisville, KY 40217	Covered Populations	3	X	X				X	X	
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	The Wesley House 5114 Preston Highway, Louisville, Ky 40213	Covered Populations	3	X				X	X	X	
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	The Somali Community Center 737 S 8th St, Louisville, KY 40203	Covered Populations	2	X	X				X	X	
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	KY Refugee Ministries 969 Cherokee Rd, Louisville, KY 40204	Covered Populations	6	X	X				X	X	

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Volunteers of America 933 Goss Ave, Louisville, KY 40217	Covered Populations	2	X						X	
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Options to Success 3218 Virginia Ave, Louisville, KY 40211	Covered Populations	1	X						X	
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	La Casita Community Center 223 East Magnolia Ave, Louisville, KY 40208	Covered Populations	10	X	X				X	X	
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/16/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Maysville Community & Technical College 400 Rocky Adkins Tech Dr. Morehead, KY 40351	Regional Listening Session	15	X	X		X	X			X

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/20/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Cox Building, 2-8 East Third St. Maysville, KY 41056	Regional Listening Session	50	X	X		X	X		X	X
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/20/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Limestone Cable Headend Facility 302 Moody Dr. Maysville, KY 41056	Stakeholders	3								
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/22/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Lexington Public Library, Eastside Branch 3000 Blake James Dr. Lexington, KY 40509	Regional Listening Session	30	X	X		X	X	X		X
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/23/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Florence ADD 22 Spiral Dr. Florence, KY 41042	Regional Listening Session	45	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Meeting with Stakeholders	3/23/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Life Learning Center 20 W 18th St, Covington, KY 41011	Stakeholders	5	X	X		X	X	X	X	

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Meeting with Core Workgroup	3/24/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Education & Labor Cabinet 500 Mero Str. Frankfort, KY 40106	Core Planning Team	10								
Community Outreach Listening Session	3/30/2023	Listening Session (Virtual)	Education & Labor Cabinet 500 Mero Str. Frankfort, KY 40106	Regional Listening Session	10								
Meeting with Frank and Shannen, Northern Kentucky University	4/3/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Education & Labor Cabinet 500 Mero Str. Frankfort, KY 40106	Stakeholders	3								
Meeting with Katie Meyer, Alta Fiber	4/4/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Jim's Seafood 950 Wilkinson's, Blvd. Frankfort, KY 40601	Stakeholders	3								

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Meeting with Dr. Sandy Curd, Promise Zone Coordinator of Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation	4/6/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Stakeholders	2								X
Meeting with Communication Services for The Deaf	4/7/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Stakeholders	2					X	X		
Meeting with Mayor of Covington, KY and Esperanza Founder	4/7/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Esperanza Latino Center	Stakeholders	3	X					X	X	
Meeting with NKU's Digital Literacy Program Team	4/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Stakeholders	6								

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Meeting with Derek Zelkowski, Digital Equity Planner for West Virginia	4/14/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Networking	2								
April meeting with State Core Workgroup	4/17/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Core Planning Team	10								
Meeting with Rena Sharpe of Goodwill Industries	5/2/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Covered Populations	3		X	X					
Meeting with Kristina Scott of United Way of Greater Cincinnati	5/2/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Covered Populations	3	X				X			
Meeting with Education and Labor Cabinet's Office of Adult Education	5/2/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Education & Labor Cabinet 500 Mero Str. Frankfort, KY 40106	Networking	5								X

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Meeting with John Koehlinger of KY Refugee Mininstries	5/4/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Covered Populations	3							**X**	
Meeting with Kari Collins of Red Bird Mission	5/4/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Covered Populations	3								**X**
Meeting with Irene Yates of Catholic Charities	5/11/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Covered Populations	3						**X**	**X**	
Meeting with Ricky Santiago, BankON Louisville, and KY Financial Empowerment Commission representatives	5/11/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Covered Populations	3	**X**							
Meeting with Veterans-focused Workforce Development staff for focus group planning	5/12/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Education & Labor Cabinet 500 Mero Str. Frankfort, KY 40106	Focus Group Planning	3				X				

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
May meeting with State Core Workgroup	5/22/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Stakeholders	10								
Veterans Focus group	5/25/2023	Listening Session (Virtual)	In Person	Covered Population	10				X				
The Kentucky Broadband Map: A Local Government Primer	6/7/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	In Person	Internet Service Providers	44								
AT&T Kick-off Celebration & First Workshop in Ft. Campbell base	6/7/2023	Workshop	Army Community Services Building, 1500 William C. Lee Road in Fort Campbell, KY	Covered Population	50				X				
Meeting with SHEEO (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association) Members and the Arizona digital equity planner	6/8/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Higher-Education and Adult Learners	2								

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Meeting with NKU's Digital Literacy Program Team	6/9/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Stakeholders	7								
POC Digital Equity Meeting with Eastern Kentucky Stakeholders	6/13/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Virtual	Stakeholders	6	X						X	X
Focus group by KY Dept. for Libraries and Archives	6/15/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	In Person	Covered Populations	7						X	X	
Focus group by Goodwill Industries in Morehead, KY	6/23/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Morehead, KY	Covered Populations	11	X		X		X			X
Focus group by Goodwill Industries in Morehead, KY	6/23/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Morehead, KY	Covered Populations	21								

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
June Meeting with State Core Workgroup	6/26/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Hybrid	Stakeholders	11								
Focus group by Red Bird Mission	6/28/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Beverly, KY	Covered Populations	9	X	X			X			X
Focus group hosted by United Way in Newport, KY	6/29/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Newport, KY	Covered Populations	7	X				X			
Focus group hosted by United Way in Newport, KY	6/29/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Newport, KY	Covered Populations	25	X				X			
The Kentucky League of Cities (KLC) is publishing our cabinet email to reach wider audience	7/17/2023	Email	Virtual	Stakeholders	65								

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Focus group hosted by Goodwill Industries in Somerset, KY	7/18/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Somerset, KY	Covered Populations	19	X	X		X	X			X
Focus group hosted by Goodwill Industries in Somerset, KY	7/18/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Somerset, KY	Covered Populations	11	X		X				X	X
State Core workgroup measurable objectives planning session	7/19/2023	Workshop	Lexington Griffin Gate Marriott Hotel 1800 Newton Pike, Lexington, KY 40511	Core Planning Team	23								
State Core workgroup measurable objectives planning session	7/20/2023	Workshop	Lexington Griffin Gate Marriott Hotel 1800 Newton Pike, Lexington, KY 40511	Core Planning Team	20								

Engagement Title/Description	Engagement Date	Engagement Type	Engagement Location	Target Audience	# Engaged	Covered Populations Reached							
						Individuals who live in covered households	Aging individuals	Incarcerated Individuals	Veterans	Individuals with disabilities	Individuals with a language barrier	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group	Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
Focus group hosted by United Way in Paducah, KY	7/24/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Paducah, KY	Covered Populations	8	X	X			X			X
Focus group hosted by United Way in Paducah, KY	7/24/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Paducah, KY	Covered Populations	7	X	X		X	X			X
Focus group hosted by United Way in Pikeville, KY	7/31/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Pikeville, KY	Covered Populations	9	X	X			X			X
Focus group hosted by United Way in Pikeville, KY	7/31/2023	Listening Session (In-person)	Pikeville, KY	Covered Populations	10	X	X			X			X
AT&T Check Presentation at Somali Community Center	8/19/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Somali Community Center 737 S 8th st suite 100., Louisville, KY 40203	Covered Populations	10	X	X			X			X
WIOA meeting discussing digital skills trainings	8/22/2023	Meeting/ Presentation	Northern Kentucky ADD	Stakeholders	10	X	X				X	X	

Appendix IV. Internet Service Providers Participating in Lifeline and the Affordable Connectivity Program

COMPANY NAME	ACP PARTNER	LIFELINE PROVIDER
Access Cable Television, Inc.	✓	
All Points Broadband	✓	
altafiber	✓	
Armstrong Telecommunications, Inc.	✓	
AT&T	✓	✓
Ballard Rural Telephone Coop	✓	✓
Bracken Cable Vision	✓	
Brandenburg Telecom LLC	✓	✓
Cathect Communications, Inc	✓	
Cellular Services, LLC	✓	
Cincinnati Bell		✓
City Communications, Inc	✓	
City of Barbourville	✓	
City of Russellville Electric Plant Board	✓	
Clear Wireless, LLC	✓	
Coalfields Telephone		✓
Comcast Xfinity	✓	
Conexon Connect LLC	✓	
Crystal Broadband Networks, Inc.	✓	
Culture Wireless	✓	
Cumberland Cellular, LLC	✓	
Cumberland Connect, LLC	✓	
Dialog Telecommunications		✓
Duo County Telephone Cooperative Corp.	✓	✓
EARTHLINK, LLC	✓	
Eastern Telephone & Technologies, Inc	✓	
Electric Plant Board of the City of Glasgow	✓	
Electric Plant Board Of The City Of Murray, Kentucky	✓	
e-Tel		✓
Figgers Communication Inc.	✓	
Foothills Rural Telephone Coop. Corp., Inc.	✓	✓
FPB or Frankfurt Plant Board	✓	
Gearheart Communications	✓	
Gibson Connect, LLC	✓	✓
GigaBeam Networks, LLC	✓	
Global Connection of America		✓
Highland Communications, LLC	✓	
Highland Telephone Cooperative, Inc	✓	
Hopkinsville Electric System	✓	
Hughes Network Systems, LLC	✓	
IgLou Internet Services	✓	
IJ Wireless	✓	
Inside Connect	✓	

Integrated Path Communications, LLC	✓	
Inter Mountain Cable Inc.	✓	
IrvineOnline	✓	
JB-Nets Broadband Services	✓	
Limestone Cable Vision	✓	
Lingo	✓	
Logan Telephone Cooperative		✓
LTC Connect	✓	
Maxsip Telecom Corporation	✓	
Mayfield Electric and Water System	✓	
Mediacom LLC	✓	
Metro Communications LLC	✓	
MetroNet	✓	
Mikrotec CATV, LLC	✓	
Mountain Rural Telephone	✓	✓
North Central Telephone Cooperative	✓	
Optimum	✓	
Peeringhub Inc	✓	
Peoples Rural Telephone Cooperative	✓	✓
Peoples Telecom, LLC	✓	
Shentel, Glofiber, and Beam Wireless	✓	
South Central Rural Telecommunications	✓	
South Central Rural Telephone Cooperative		
South Central Telecom	✓	✓
Spectrum (Charter Communications Operating, LLC)	✓	
SprintFone	✓	
TDS Telecom/Leslie County Telephone Company		✓
TDS Telecom/Lewisport Telephone Company		✓
TDS Telecom/Salem Telephone Company		✓
TDS Telecommunications Corporation	✓	
Thackers-Grigsby Communications	✓	✓
TOAST.net Internet Service	✓	
TV Service	✓	
U2 CONNECT NOW	✓	
Verizon Wireless	✓	
Viasat	✓	
W.A.T.C.H. TV Company	✓	
West Kentucky Rural Telephone Cooperative Corp., Inc.	✓	
Windstream Communications	✓	✓
WK&T Telecommunications		✓
Zito West Holding, LLC	✓	

Appendix V. Focus Group Methodology

To learn more about internet access and adoption among covered populations, the Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC) partnered with several nonprofits and government agencies to conduct a series of focus groups. The purpose of these focus groups was to gather insights into individuals' thoughts regarding their current internet options, how they use their internet service, and barriers that prevent some Kentuckians from subscribing to high-speed internet at home.

ELC partnered with five nonprofit organizations and state agencies to host these focus groups: The Kentucky Career Development Office, Goodwill Industries, the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, Red Bird Mission, and United Way. hese organizations hosted a total of seventeen focus groups between May 25 and August 22, 2023. Focus groups were offered in-person at various locations around the state, as well as online through teleconferencing platforms. Altogether, 191 Kentucky adults participated in these groups, representing all eight covered populations as defined by Section I.C. of the Digital Equity Act's Notice of Funding Opportunity: individuals living in covered households (i.e., those with annual household incomes below 150% of the federal poverty rate); individuals age 60 or older; incarcerated individuals (other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility); veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier (including English learners and individuals with low levels of literacy); members of racial or ethnic minority groups; and individuals living in rural parts of the state. Partner organizations shared transcripts, along with their own observations and insights, for narrative and content analyses (provided by Connected Nation, Inc.).

Appendix VI. Residential Survey Methodology

To explore internet access and adoption challenges faced by Kentuckians, particularly covered populations in the state, the Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC) partnered with several nonprofits and government agencies to conduct a survey of Kentucky adults across the state. These surveys were designed through a partnership between the Kentucky Center for Statistics, the Kentucky ELC, and Connected Nation to gather insights into households' computer ownership, home internet adoption, barriers to adoption, and how they use their internet service. Additionally, the survey collected demographic data from participants to identify differences among covered populations in the state.

ELC partnered with five nonprofit organizations and state agencies to offer these surveys to their clients: The Kentucky Career Development Office, Goodwill Industries, the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, Red Bird Mission, and United Way. The survey was offered through an online portal and as a paper document. Between June 14 and September 13, 2023, these organizations collected information from 2,478 adult Kentuckians. These respondents represent seven of the eight covered populations as defined by Section I.C. of the Digital Equity Act's Notice of Funding Opportunity: individuals living in covered households (i.e., those with annual household incomes below 150% of the federal poverty rate); individuals age 60 or older; veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier (including English learners and individuals with low levels of literacy); members of racial or ethnic minority groups; and individuals living in rural parts of the state. Inmates are considered a vulnerable population due to the constraints of being incarcerated, precluding the survey from interviewing incarcerated individuals. Of the 2,478 Kentucky adults surveyed, 2,306 self-identify as members of at least one of these covered populations.

The Kentucky Center for Statistics and Connected Nation analyzed the results of these surveys; those results are presented in the Kentucky Digital Equity Plan.

Appendix VII. Key Terms

Artificial Intelligence (AI) - The term 'artificial intelligence' means a machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations or decisions influencing real or virtual environments.

Source: The National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Office (NAIIO)

Broadband - The term broadband commonly refers to high-speed internet access that is always on and faster than traditional dial-up access. Broadband includes several high-speed transmission technologies, such as fiber, wireless, satellite, digital subscriber line, and cable. For the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), broadband capability requires consumers to have access to actual download speeds of at least 25 Mbps and actual upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps.

Source: Connected Nation

Broadband Equity - Broadband equity is achieved when all people and communities are able to access and use affordable, high-speed, reliable internet that meets their long-term needs.

Source: NDIA

Community Anchor Institution - Community anchor institutions (CAIs) – schools, libraries, healthcare providers, community colleges, public media, public housing, and other community organizations – are the key institutions that enable universal access to broadband.

Source: SHLB

Covered Populations -The term is defined in Digital Equity Act Sec. 60302(8) of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and includes (A) individuals who live in low-income households; (B) aging individuals; (C) incarcerated individuals; (D) veterans; (E) individuals with disabilities; (F) individuals with a language barrier; (G) individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and (H) individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.

Source: 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Digital Citizenship - Digital citizenship can be defined as the norms of behavior with regard to technology use. As a way of understanding the complexity of digital citizenship and the issues of technology use, abuse, and misuse, we have identified nine general areas of behavior that make up digital citizenship.

1. Etiquette: electronic standards of conduct or procedure
2. Communication: electronic exchange of information
3. Education: the process of teaching and learning about technology and the use of technology
4. Access: full electronic participation in society
5. Commerce: electronic buying and selling of goods
6. Responsibility: electronic responsibility for actions and deeds
7. Rights: those freedoms extended to everyone in a digital world
8. Safety: physical well-being in a digital technology world
9. Security (self-protection): electronic precautions to guarantee safety

Source: Department of Education

Digital Equity - The condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States.

Source: 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Digital Equity Ecosystem - "...interactions between individuals, populations, communities, and their larger sociotechnical environments that all play a role in shaping the digital inclusion work in local communities to promote more equitable access to technology and social and racial justice."

Source: Rhinesmith, Colin, and Susan Kennedy. "Growing Healthy Digital Equity Ecosystems During COVID-19 and Beyond." Evanston, IL: Benton Institute for Broadband & Society, October 2020. http://benton.org/digital-equity-ecosystems-report

Digital Inclusion - the activities necessary to ensure that individuals and communities have the tools and resources to access and meaningfully use the internet and related technology. Primary elements of advancing digital inclusion include:

- Access to reliable and affordable Internet service
- Access to internet-enabled devices that meet a user's needs
- Availability of basic digital literacy training and technical support
- Use of applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration
- Basic awareness of online safety and related matters

Source: NDIA

Digital Literacy - the ability to use current technologies, such as smartphones and laptops, and internet access to research, create content, and interact with the world. There are five key characteristics of a digitally literate person. The digitally literate person:

- Possesses the variety of skills — technical and cognitive — required to find, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information in a wide variety of formats
- Can use diverse technologies appropriately and effectively to retrieve information, interpret results and judge the quality of that information
- Understands the relationship between technology, lifelong learning, personal privacy, and stewardship of information
- Uses these skills and the appropriate technology to communicate and collaborate with peers, colleagues, family, and on occasion, the general public
- Uses these skills to participate in civic society actively and contribute to a vibrant, informed, and engaged community

Source: American Library Association

Digital Navigator - Digital navigators are trusted guides who assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills, and application support.

Source: NDIA

Grassroots Organizing - As the name suggests, grassroots organizing is a method of mobilization that comes from the ground up — everyday people come together to address an issue in their community and take action to advocate for change.

Source: Impactive

Internet of Things - This refers to the growing phenomenon of building connectivity into vehicles, wearable devices, appliances and other household items such as thermostats, as well as goods moving through business supply chains. It also covers the rapid spread of data-emitting or tracking sensors in the physical environment that give readouts on everything from crop conditions to pollution levels to where there are open parking spaces to babies' breathing rates in their cribs.

Source: The Pew Charitable Trusts

The Digital Divide - This disparity between people who have easy access to high-speed internet and communication technology and those who have limited or no access and may lack the necessary skills to use technology effectively.

Source: Connected Nation

Appendix VII. Key Terms

BETTER INTERNET INITIATIVE:
LISTENING TOUR REPORT

TEAM KENTUCKY

REGION: Statewide
Attendance — 253

In early 2023, as part of the ongoing Better Internet Initiative the Office of Broadband Development and the Education and Labor Cabinet conducted a statewide listening tour, traveling across the Commonwealth to engage with communities and local leaders about the state of high-speed internet in their regions. State leaders heard directly from communities about local needs around internet access, adoption, and use.

Statewide, 82% of the participants in these conversations were from the region and included representatives from local governments, education, nonprofits, internet service providers, business owners, and local residents. These participants represented their communities and key covered populations, including 59% rural residents, 32% people with disabilities, 39% low-income households, 28% veterans, 39% seniors, 25% people of color, 23% individuals with language barriers, and 17% incarcerated people.

Through open conversation, participants shared their perspectives on the current state of high-speed internet in the region, what barriers exist in their community to accessing and using the internet, what benefits the region would experience if more people go online, and what priorities the state should consider when developing an effective and informed high-speed internet and digital equity plan.

The key data points statewide are highlighted in this report.

** Covered populations are defined in section 60302.B of the Digital Equity Act as: 1. Individuals who live in covered households (those earning less than 150% of the Federal poverty threshold); 2. Aging individuals; 3. Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility; 4. Veterans; 5. Individuals with disabilities; 6. Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who— a. Are English learners; and b. Have low levels of literacy; 7. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and 8. Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.*

Summary of Common Perspectives Statewide

Description of high-speed internet service in the region:
Slow, unreliable, available, expensive, fast, inconsistent

Top barrier to high-speed internet subscription:
Internet service is too expensive

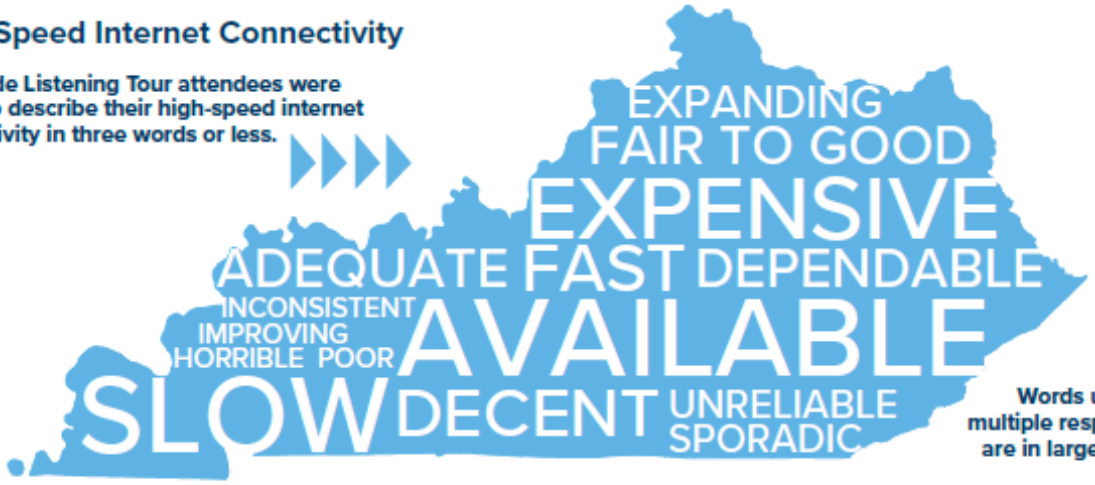
Digital inclusion services available locally:
1. Public access to computers
2. Public access to Wi-Fi connectivity
3. Telehealth services

Impact of increased access to high-speed internet and digital skills training:
1. Increased teleworking opportunities
2. Upskilling/education opportunities
3. Attraction of economic investment

To learn more about the planning process, visit broadband.ky.gov or digitalequity.ky.gov

High-Speed Internet Connectivity

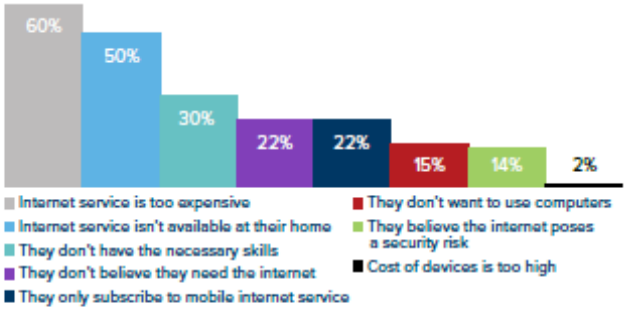
Statewide Listening Tour attendees were asked to describe their high-speed internet connectivity in three words or less.



Words used in multiple responses are in larger type.

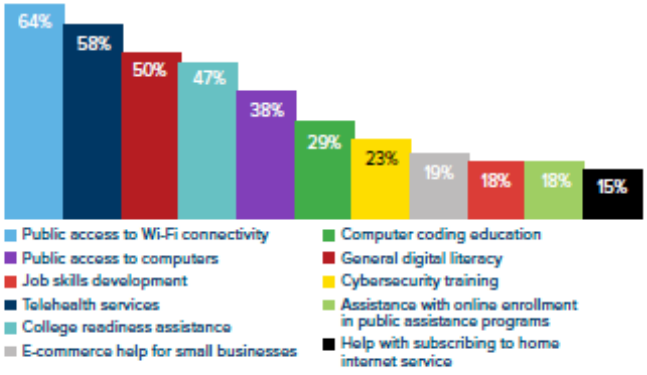
Barriers to Home Internet Subscription

Why do you believe some people do not subscribe to home internet service in your community?



Digital Inclusion Services Available in the Region

To the best of your knowledge, which digital inclusion opportunities are available in your community?



How would your community benefit from increased access to high-speed internet and digital skills training?

- Increased telework opportunities — 61%
- Upskilling/educational opportunities — 55%
- Attract economic investment — 55%
- Increased telehealth options — 52%
- Small businesses can start or expand — 50%
- Increased tourism in the region — 36%
- Increased agricultural production — 29%

Top Priorities for the Region

Priority #1: Improve high-speed infrastructure
Priority #2: Increase the speed and reliability of internet connections
Priority #3: Make internet service more affordable

Other priorities: *Offer computer skills training, enhance job skills and career development, improve access to computer skills training and public Wi-Fi, improve access to internet safety training, improve access to high-quality computing devices*

Statewide Data Profile

COUNTY	TOTAL POPULATION	POPULATION 60+ (%)	POPULATION SPEAKING NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT HOME (%)	POPULATION WHO DOESN'T IDENTIFY AS WHITE-ONLY NON-HISPANIC (%)	POPULATION WITH INCOME BELOW 150% OF POVERTY LINE (%)	VETERANS (%)	POPULATION WITH A DISABILITY (%)
STATEWIDE	**4,494,141**	**23%**	**6%**	**14%**	**26%**	**7%**	**17%**

"Source: 2017-2021 5-year estimate from the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)"

Contacts:

Kentucky Office of Broadband Development
100 Airport Road, 3rd Floor
Frankfort, KY 40601
502.892.3002
email: broadband@ky.gov
web: broadband.ky.gov

Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet
500 Mero Street
Frankfort, KY 40601
502.564.0372
web: digitalequity.ky.gov

Appendix IX. Public Comments and Responses

First Public Comment Period September 15-October 15, 2023

Commenter's Name: Rhonda Florence

Commenter's Organization: Cynthiana-Harrison County Public Library

Commenter's Organization: rflorence@cynthianalibrary.org

Commenter's Email Address: NA

- Relevant Section of the Plan: We currently have 25 wi-fi hotspots that are constantly on loan to community patrons. However, when offering the ACP to patrons, we have very little interest in participating. Even $30/month is too much money for many of our patrons. The cost of basic service needs to be kept as low as possible in order to truly offer equity. There are several area of our county where there is no access available - even cell phones don't work in these areas. Finding these dead spots is crucial for success.
- Feedback Provided: We would be glad to help as possible with training and offering free wi-fi hotspot checkout. I believe most libraries would be willing to provide these services.

Response

Based on the Better Internet Listening tour and other stakeholder engagement efforts, we received similar feedback regarding affordability, even with the ACP program. Therefore, we included opportunities for affordable programs throughout the plan. There are also actions within the plan to work with local government and other partners to identify and expand affordability programs.

Objectives 1 and 2 speak to diversifying the Commonwealth's strategy in expanding affordable devices and access. We look forward to partnering with anchor institutions such as libraries to achieve the vision and mission of the plan.

Commenter's Name: Greg Schwartz

Commenter's Title: Manager of Computer Services

Commenter's Organization: Louisville Free Public Library

Commenter's Email Address: greg.schwartz@lfpl.org

Relevant Section of the Plan:2.2 Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes

- Feedback Provided: My comment is about the entire document, but ties into the scope of this section in particular. The plan reflects the pursuit of many worthy initiatives and actions. But as I read through the document, the actual running theme seems to be "We've identified the root problem: internet service is too expensive. But we don't think we can do anything about the root problem, so here's everything we're trying to minimize the impact of it." I recognize that the Commonwealth is a small player in the digital equity landscape. But this plan seems to be thinking so inwardly about Kentucky that it fails to even posit that coordinated effort between states crafting similar plans (and gathering similar data) might create some pressure on the telecommunication providers to actually lower pricing. Or on the federal government to move in the direction of internet as utility. Or whatever larger systemic thinking might actually attack the central problem of having almost every surveyed group tell us that they can't afford monthly internet service. My concern is that this document seems unaware of a world beyond itself/Kentucky and disinterested in aligning with existing efforts beyond the state's borders. Maybe that's by design, but it feels more reactive to the symptoms than proactive about the root issue.

Response

The State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program provides $60 million to fund States, DC, Territories, and tribal entities development of a Digital Equity Plan, which must be completed and submitted to NTIA within one year of award. Such plans much include elements outlines in the statute and the Notice of Funding Opportunity. The State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program is part of the larger State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program, the purpose of which it to promote the achievement of digital equity, support digital inclusion activities, and build capacity for efforts by States, DC, Territories, and tribal entities relating to the adoption of broadband by residents of those States, DC, Territories, and Tribal entities. These eligible entities interested in participating in the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program must first complete a State Digital Equity Plan, as contemplated in Section 60304© of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, Public Law 117-58, 135 Stat. 429 (November 15, 2021) also commonly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Territories and Tribal entities also may apply for funding from the State Digital Equity programs, using processes set out in the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

Commenter's Name: Adrianne Furniss
Commenter's Title: Executive Director
Commenter's Organization: Benton Institute for Broadband & Society
Commenter's Email Address: afurniss@benton.org

Relevant Section of the Plan:2 Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity

- Feedback Provided: One key requirement of state digital equity plans is that they include a state's vision of digital equity. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) suggests that digital equity visions address at least these two questions: 1. What will digital equity look like in the context of your state? 2. What are the broad goals that should be accomplished in executing this plan (e.g., improve rural health outcomes, increase underrepresented youth employment in technology-related fields)? NTIA has specifically advised states to "lead with equity," intentionally identifying, amplifying, and centering the voices of those most affected by the digital divide and disconnected communities. With the extraordinary task and responsibility of state policymakers and local communities in mind, the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society launched the Visions of Digital Equity project to aid both in ensuring that more community voices are heard in crafting visions that increase opportunity for all. Through surveys, community meetings, interviews, conversations, and a collaborative writing process with community contributors, we have arrived at a set of principles to help guide both the process and the resulting visions of digital equity. We learned that a well-crafted vision of digital equity has the potential to be very powerful. It can: • Offer a glimpse of a state transformed by universal connectivity, • Provide a roadmap and resources for the digital inclusion efforts to come, and • Act as a north star for goal setting, planning, and implementation efforts over the months and years to come. The best visions of digital equity will be community centered and focused on creating change, specific and clearly articulated, and ambitious but attainable. The Benton Institute for Broadband & Society reviewed the Education and Labor Cabinet's draft Digital Equity Plan Commonwealth of Kentucky and shared a summary of it with our readers (see https://www.benton.org/blog/kentucky-pursues-full-and-equitable-digital-access-all) One of the people we heard from was Dr. Danielle King, the diversity, equity, and inclusion advisor in the Kentucky Department for Public Health, Office of Health Equity. She shared lessons from her efforts in Kentucky in an essay titled Bringing Digital Equity to Appalachia (see https://www.benton.org/blog/bringing-digital-equity-appalachia) Upon review, we offer 10 Principles for Digital Equity Visions (see https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/VisionsDigitalEquity.pdf). We hope these principles help the people of Kentucky evaluate both the draft Digital Equity Plan and the revision of the plan. To that end, we also offer A Checklist for Evaluating Digital Equity Visions: https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/DEV_checklist.pdf Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on the plan; I would be happy to answer any questions or discuss the potential of Kentucky's vision for digital equity.
- Other Comments: Visions of Digital Equity: Principles to guide the creation of states' visions of digital equity https://www.benton.org/publications/visions-digital-equity A Checklist for Evaluating Digital Equity Visions https://www.benton.org/sites/default/files/DEV_checklist.pdf Bringing Digital Equity to Appalachia https://www.benton.org/blog/bringing-digital-equity-appalachia

Response

The State plan, and particularly the vision and mission statements, were developed by the core team. Taking into consideration all of the stakeholder engagement processes with betterment of the covered populations in mind. However, the suggestions made were thought provoking and resulted in an updated vision statement and a review of the resources shared in your comment.

Commenter's Name: Benjy Hamm(1), Al Cross(2) and David Thompson(3)
Commenter's Organization: (1,2) Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, University of Kentucky; (3) Kentucky Press Association
Commenter's Title: (1) Director and Associate Professor; (2) Director Emeritus and Professor; (3) Executive Director (sic)
Commenter's Email Address: al.cross@uky.edu

Relevant Section of the Plan: 1 Executive Summary

Provided Feedback: THESE COMMENTS APPLY TO MULTIPLE SECTIONS OF THE PLAN, WHICH ARE REFERENCED IN THE TEXT. "Executive Summary" is marked as a default choice since multiple sections could not be selected. If comments are grouped by section, please make sure that all relevant comments are included with the appropriate sections.

To whom it may concern:

We write as representatives of, and advocates for, Kentucky's news industry. We believe it should be a greater part of the state's Digital Equity Plan

The plan's overall goal is to give all Kentuckians "access to the necessary technological resources to fully engage in our society, democracy, and economy." Since before Kentucky became a state, newspapers have been a primary resource for citizens to fully engage in society, in the economy, and in local, state and national democracy. They are still the primary finders of fact in American society, and at the local level their pages are trusted forums for discussion of public issues and sharing of useful information.

In rural Kentucky, the average paid penetration of newspapers is still about 30% of households, three to five times that of metropolitan newspapers, according to our ongoing research of population, housing and newspaper circulation data. And the actual reach of these newspapers is much greater, through pass-along copies and access to their websites, which is often free.

Newspapers' important role in Kentucky is illustrated by Figure 4 in the draft plan, which says "Read(ing) online newspapers or other news sources" is the third leading internet activity of Kentucky households, after messaging and personal finance. And in the plan's section on veterans, one says of information they need, "It's not on the newspaper, it's marketed digitally."

However, those are the draft plan's only reference to newspapers, despite the fact that they are some of the most reliable sources of information available to Kentuckians. They are almost entirely non-partisan, at a time when misinformation fed by partisanship is a major problem in American society, and they are largely focused on local and state issues.

We agree with the goal of ensuring that every Kentucky citizen has the ability for full engagement online, through broadband. But the plan fails to recognize perhaps the biggest societal issue with the internet: misinformation and disinformation, which we define as deliberate misinformation.

The words "misinformation" and "disinformation" appear nowhere in the plan. That is a serious omission, in our opinion – especially at a time when newspapers are less able than before to make clear to Kentuckians what the facts are, due to changes caused largely by digital technology. We believe that trend must be reversed, or eventually the dreams of universal broadband will mean little more than "high-speed access to garbage" when it comes to information about public affairs.

Many rural Kentucky newspapers are having difficulty adapting to the digital environment, either because they are independently owned and lack the necessary resources and know-how, or because they are owned by chains that have business obligations to their owners and lenders and lack the ability to tailor their digital presence to individual newspaper markets.

The second paragraph of the Executive Summary of the draft Digital Equity Plan calls for "robust public-private partnerships," and we believe one of those should be funding a digital counselor to help rural Kentucky newspapers adapt to the digital age – and help their audiences, including local businesses, do likewise. Making rural Kentucky's newspapers more digital will help Kentucky become more digital. We believe such a position could be funded for approximately $100,000 a year, based on a salary of $75,000, a taxes-and-benefits rate of 28% and $4,000 for travel. The position could exist at the Institute for Rural Journalism or the Kentucky Press Association, with the help available to KPA members.

This would include online-only news sites; KPA has eight online-only members and the number is growing. Each online member must be admitted by the KPA Board of Directors, ensuring that only legitimate news organizations are members. KPA membership would be the verifier of legitimacy, through its membership qualifications. These include a Periodicals class mailing permit, which requires that no more than 75% of the newspaper's content can be advertising.

This is a draft proposal, just as your plan is a draft. We hope to engage in discussions with you about how we can advance not only the cause of digital equity but also the need for reliable online information.

We have additional comments about the draft plan:

The first paragraph of the plan's Executive Summary says it aims to "ensure there is training and support available to develop our citizens' digital skills," and one of its objectives (Objective 6) is to "Empower all Kentuckians to develop the digital skills necessary for work and life," including participation in society, the economy and democracy.

Strategy 6 for achieving Objective 6 is to "Increase participation in telehealth services, resulting in improved health outcomes of covered populations." We believe that this objective should be stated more broadly, incorporating a health-literacy element in which newspapers are already playing a significant role.

Kentucky newspapers have greatly increased their coverage of health issues in the last decade, prompted in large measure by Kentucky Health News, funded by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky and published by the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues. Their coverage increased greatly during the pandemic, when newspapers fulfilled their roles as trusted sources of information at a time when misinformation exploded.

That problem is continuing, and we believe that making newspapers stronger digitally will put them in a better position to combat misinformation about health topics, bolster their position as providers of trusted information, and help Kentuckians live healthier lives. Health equity and digital equity can go hand in hand, as the draft plan's Health Outcomes section acknowledges.

The plan's Civic and Social Engagement section implicitly acknowledges that, by saying in its second paragraph, "Broadband can assist with civic and social engagement in Kentucky by providing Kentuckians a means to stay informed about current events by reading news articles," especially in rural areas. Nice, but that latter point needs recasting.

The section says "This is especially important for people who live in rural areas, where they may not have access to traditional news sources," which we think misstates the case. All but one rural Kentucky county (Robertson) has a newspaper, and the state's rural newspaper circulation and household penetration – the percentage of a county's residents who get the paper by subscription or local single-copy sales – are healthier than those of newspapers in metropolitan counties. We track these data, which are public, and can provide them upon request.

The next point in the section says broadband can help citizens "participate in online discussions about important issues by joining online forums, commenting on articles, and sharing their thoughts on social media." We think that should be expanded to include news-media websites and newspaper opinion pages, which accept digital letters to the editor.

The plan's Key Findings in the Executive Summary include: "The leading barriers to internet adoption for covered populations are a lack of access to high-speed networks, affordability of high-speed internet and devices, and a lack of digital skills." We think that, and the narrative in the "Needs Assessment" section (3.2), both miss something important: many Kentuckians' lack of interest in, and/or desire for, internet service. The plan confirms that in Figures 7 and 11, where "You don't need the internet" ranks third, at 11%, among the overall

Other Feedback: THESE COMMENTS APPLY TO MULTIPLE SECTIONS OF THE PLAN, WHICH ARE REFERENCED IN THE TEXT. "Executive Summary" is marked as a default choice since multiple sections could not be selected. If comments are grouped by section, please make sure that all relevant comments are included with the appropriate sections.

Many rural Kentucky newspapers are having difficulty adapting to the digital environment, either because they are independently owned by individuals or families and lack the necessary resources and know-how, or because they are owned by chains that have business obligations to their owners and lenders and lack the ability to tailor their digital presence to individual newspaper markets. Both types would welcome the opportunity to expand their digital offerings. All they need is some encouragement and assistance.

Response

Newspapers have historically played a vital role in rural America by serving as a primary source of information and communication within communities. Citizens often depend on their local newspaper as a lifeline. For many Kentuckians local news, community connection, agriculture information, advertising, government accountability, education, emergency information, and cultural preservation come from local newspapers. They provide a platform for sharing news about local businesses, schools, events, community activities and government. However, it's worth noting that the role of newspapers has evolved with the digital age, and many rural communities now rely on online news sources and social media. This shift has presented both opportunities and challenges for rural journalism, as it has for newspapers in urban areas.

We recognize this comment and agree wholeheartedly with your assessment. Currently the state funding levels have not been set for the capacity and implementation grants by the Department of Commerce. Partnerships with KPA and other community anchor organizations will be vital for the success of moving digital equity forward for each person in the commonwealth.

We appreciate the feedback you provided regarding the omission of the words "misinformation" and "disinformation" in the plan. While we were not explicit in naming them, those ideas were driving tenants in the development of several of the actions and objectives addressing digital skills training and security, as outlined in strategies and actions related to objectives 4, 5, and 6. We envision the training curriculum would incorporate important topics such as source validation and responsible sharing of information.

We look forward to working with you and others during the next phase of this work.

Commenter's Name: Adam Haley
Commenter's Organization: Goodwill Industries of KY
Commenter's Title: Director of Policy and Strategy
Commenter's Email Address: adam.haley@goodwillky.org

Relevant Section of the Plan: 3.2.1 Barriers for Covered Populations, Adoption and Affordability

Provided Feedback: Incarcerated and justice-involved population is not represented in the survey data (Pages 36-48). Participants in our focus groups shared lack of awareness, cost, and quality of service as barriers to adoption of broadband. Information security was also a highlight of focus group attendees for both populations (Seniors and Justice-Involved) that Goodwill surveyed. Fears around identity theft and scams led to lower rates of adoption.

Other Feedback: Overall the feedback from the focus groups was in line with anecdotal evidence shared by Goodwill employees that serve the covered populations. More attention should be paid to justice-involved populations as they are underrepresented across the board and, given Kentucky's incarceration rates, are a growing population seeking reintegration into society.

Response

Your feedback regarding the lack of information about Incarcerated and justice-involved individuals was well received. There was a technical error in the transcription of those focus groups and as a result the data was not available for inclusion in the initial document. During the public comment period additional resources were utilized to extract data from the recordings and transcripts. Because of those efforts, information pertaining to incarcerated and justice involved persons have been elaborated on in the plan. We appreciate your comments regarding the level of attention that should be paid to this vital population and look forward to partnering with you to serve them in the capacity building and implementation phases of this work.

Commenter's Name: Daniel Roe
Commenter's Organization: AARP Kentucky
Commenter's Title: Advocacy & Community Engagement Manager
Commenter's Email Address: droe@aarp.org

Relevant Section of the Plan: 5.1 Implementation Strategy & Key Activities

Provided Feedback: Under Objective 6, in conjunction with "personal digital skills assessments and certifications", AARP supports the Plan incorporate a social impact model to understand how their digital skills training programs are impacting areas of participants' lives e.g., Did they find a job? Is there an increase in confidence? Are they better connected? Do they have a greater understanding of their health?

- AARP supports the inclusion of Key Performance Indicators – KPIs - (baseline, short- and long-term measures) and adding an "outcome measures" column alongside "output measures" to monitor the measurable impact on covered populations. Adding this specificity will better target resources and ensure stronger accountability once resources are deployed.
- AARP supports the Plan clarifying in Objective 3, Strategy 4 "Improve civic and social engagement options for covered populations" that separate actions and measures are appropriate for each covered population. Each covered population will have a different experience of engaging with their community (e.g., social isolation, language and cultural barriers).
- To contribute to the goal of digital equity, AARP recommends the Plan require all BEAD recipients to commit to providing high-speed internet access at $30/month maximum to customers who qualify for the ACP.
- AARP recommends that the Plan commit to tracking, to the extent data are available, participation among different covered populations. For example, the USAC ACP tracking data shows age-based disaggregation among ACP participants in Kentucky.
- Building off of the Plan, AARP supports some type of well-publicized, easy-to-use digital equity "dashboard" that monitors availability, affordability (speeds, prices), and adoption (numbers of subscribers, if possible, disaggregated by covered population) could include aggregated metrics to track general trends and maps to display information visually on an ongoing basis, as the Plan does through its inclusion of many helpful maps.
- If needed, AARP urges the ELC to seek legislative authority to require providers to submit data to assist with the implementation and assessment of the progress of the Digital Equity Plan (e.g., regarding deployment, prices, adoption, speeds, and technology)
- AARP urges the final Plan to include a commitment to regularly collect, analyze, and report internet access adoption and deployment, by technology and speed, at a geographically granular level so that ELC can monitor the extent to which some communities may be being offered inferior high-speed internet access options.
- AARP recommends that the final Plan include an ongoing commitment to continue and build off of the data collected and reported in the Plan, and to make that data readily accessible to stakeholders throughout the state.
- Other Feedback: Introduction
- AARP commends the Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC) for its comprehensive blueprint to guide the state's progress toward achieving digital equity throughout the state, and the reflection of the input of many throughout Kentucky, including residents and stakeholders in the development of the draft Digital Equity Plan (Plan) (pages 49-52), as well as its launching of a "digital equity website." Plan, page 49.

The Plan cross-references Kentucky's Office of Broadband Development's "Better Internet Program." Plan at 1. As the Plan explains, in 2022, Kentucky House Bill 315 established the Kentucky Office of Broadband Development (OBD) to act as the primary entity for coordinating and planning broadband services throughout the state. Plan, page 18. AARP welcomes the interagency coordination, which is key to the successful implementation of the Plan.

AARP welcomes the opportunity to submit its comments as well as to work with the Commonwealth's agencies and other stakeholders not only in helping to finalize but also in implementing the Plan. Digital equity has been a long-running focus of AARP's advocacy at the federal and state level. Affordable, reliable and ubiquitous high-speed internet access, supported by digital literacy training and affordable, quality devices, is essential to older adults and can assist them with aging in place safely and with a higher quality of life than would otherwise be possible.

AARP's comments are informed, in part, by AARP's earlier reviews of eight other state draft digital equity plans, AARP's familiarity with the Digital Equity Act (and NTIA's guidelines) as well as by AARP's high-speed internet advocacy of many years at the federal and state levels.

AARP supports fully the strategies set forth in Section 5 (the Implementation) portion of the Plan, which include, among others, a focus on increasing Kentuckians' adoption of high-speed internet access (including devices), digital literacy, access to telehealth, and more. AARP also commends the Plan for including a commitment to ongoing data gathering, data analysis, and surveys to assess progress and inform future digital equity efforts. Plan, pages 53-66. AARP welcomes the Plan's commitment to engage stakeholders in the Plan's implementation. Plan, pages 67-68.

AARP fully supports the Plan's proposed alignment with its state goals such as economic development, quality of education, and quality of health care. Plan, page 18.

Affordability is a major obstacle to achieving digital equity and directly relates to consumers' disposable income, which, of course, varies enormously throughout the Commonwealth and within communities. The Plan reports: "According to Kentuckians who attended listening tours across the state, 60% said that high costs were a barrier to subscribing to home internet." Plan, page 27. The Plan also reports: "The monthly cost of home internet service is the top barrier among respondents aged 60 or older, low-income households, and rural households." Plan, page 31. These findings are consistent with AARP's understanding of older adults' barriers to high-speed internet access adoption.

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) helps income-eligible households but for those households with fixed incomes and those struggling to pay bills who are not ACP-eligible, the high price of high-speed internet access (and necessary devices) deters adoption. AARP has been a long-time advocate for affordable high-speed internet access, promoting measures such as at the ACP (which subsidizes income-eligible households' internet subscriptions) as well as municipally-owned (or regionally-owned) internet access networks (which typically result in lower monthly prices than those charged by commercial providers, and also can offer substantial benefits for communities such as economic development, remote learning, etc.). To contribute to the goal of digital equity, all BEAD recipients should commit to provide high-speed internet access at $30/month maximum to customers who qualify for the ACP. AARP is actively advocating for continuing funding for ACP.

AARP strongly concurs that affordability is a major barrier to digital equity. To the extent that publicly owned and operated internet access networks can lead to more affordable prices than commercially owned ones, AARP suggests that the final Plan identify this as one of various approaches to achieving affordability.

ELC reports that presently 48.6 percent of eligible households participate in the ACP (411,231 out of 846,290 households). Plan, page 28. AARP fully supports the Plan's goal of increasing broadband adoption by 4% annually from 74% for covered populations, and related to this objective to conduct three longitudinal residential broadband surveys at the end of Years 2, 4 and 5 to track progress. Plan at 55. For the sake of clarity, AARP recommends that the Plan explain whether the 4% annual increase would be in percentage points such that, for example after the first year, the adoption rate would be 78% (i.e., 74 plus 4) or if by 4%, the objective would be after the first year, the adoption rate would be 77% (i.e. 74 * 1.04). Plan, page 55.

A similar clarification may be appropriate relative to the goal of increasing ACP participation by 3% in targeted counties, as well as a clarification of whether the intent is an annual goal. Plan, page 55.

AARP also recommends that the Plan commit to tracking, to the extent data are available, participation among different covered populations. For example, the USAC ACP tracking data show this age-based disaggregation among ACP participants in Kentucky:

It would of course be useful if the USAC age categories coincided with the Digital Equity Act's definition of older adults: The final Plan could also point out that it would be helpful, if USAC's age brackets aligned with the Digital Equity Act's definition of older adults (aged 60 and over).

Importance of Data-Driven, Informed Policy Making and Program Implementation

The Plan's grounding in data and its integration of map-based tools is impressive. Among other things, the Plan includes a link to an interactive map can be switched between Census block groups and counties and filtered to show data for the eight covered populations. Plan, page 20, with link to: KY Map of Targeted Populations - Digital Equity

Similarly, Figure 5 depicts geographically the percentage of households participating in the ACP, which is an invaluable tool for tailoring ACP outreach. Plan, pages 28-29. Similarly Figure 6 ("Percentage of Households that Do Not Own Internet-enabled Computing Devices by County") can guide outreach efforts. Plan, page 30.

The map showing relative percentages of older adults throughout the state is another example of useful data-based information in the Plan. Plan, page 37.

Consistent with this emphasis on data and mapping tools, AARP recommends that the final Plan include the goal of transparency and widespread access to data. This can inform state agencies and stakeholders as they measure progress in achieving digital equity, and can guide and inform the adoption of best practices. The numerous maps and references to data in the Plan provide a solid foundation for achieving this important goal.

Building off of the Plan, some type of well-publicized, easy-to-use digital equity "dashboard" that monitors availability, affordability (speeds, prices), and adoption (numbers of subscribers, if possible, disaggregated by covered population) could include aggregated metrics to track general trends and maps to display information visually on an ongoing basis, as the Plan does through its inclusion of many helpful maps. Toward the achievement of this goal, AARP commends the ELC for its plan to build a publicly accessible catalog of state and national subsidies on the digital equity website, which would, among other things, "

The social impact and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) comments and will build into capacity building investments and implementation investments as appropriate. Our stakeholder engagement, focus group and residential survey feedback indicates there are some common barriers and unique barriers of the covered populations to improve social engagement and will build out those measures when making investments with our trusted community partners and institutional anchors. Impact measures have been set or clarified for the covered populations under various objectives in the final plan.

Response

We appreciate the feedback regarding BEAD investments and have shared AARP feedback with the Office of Broadband Development (OBD). Education and Labor Cabinet (ELC) will collaborate with OBD to incorporate suggestions as funding, data and/or grant opportunities allow such as low-cost service options at or below $30, a digital equity dashboard, and collect and analyze deployment and penetration data on a geographic and/or covered population basis. ELC is committed to ensuring that its digital equity website is a place for transparency and accountability in addition to a place to access digital equity resources.

ELC will take under advisement the need to explore legislative authority and funding to achieve the objectives of the plan. ELC appreciates AARP's commitment to federal, state and local advocacy around access and affordability as well as its offer to partner with the Commonwealth in its DE capacity building and implementation efforts.

Commenter's Name: Joni Hart
Commenter's Organization: Comcast
Commenter's Title: VP Government Affairs
Commenter's Email Address: joni_hart@comcast.com

Relevant Section of the Plan: 6 Conclusion

Comcast Cable Communications, LLC, on behalf of its subsidiaries (together, "Comcast"), submits this letter in response to the Kentucky Draft Digital Equity Plan ("Draft Plan" or "Plan"). Comcast thanks the Kentucky Office of Systems Equity for seeking stakeholder comment and commends it for an exemplary start to achieving digital opportunity for all Kentuckian residents and communities.

We applaud Kentucky for being the second highest in the country in Affordable Connectivity Program ("ACP") sign-ups. As we note in our comments, Comcast is committed to promoting ACP and looks forward to continuing to work with the Commonwealth to keep driving ACP awareness and adoption.

Comcast is a strong supporter of broadband deployment and adoption initiatives in Kentucky and stands ready to further support the Commonwealth's efforts. Comcast continues to invest heavily in the Commonwealth, with investments during the past three years totaling $122.6 million, including $55.2 million toward technology and infrastructure investments like Internet network upgrades. Nearly 133,000 Kentucky homes and businesses have access to Xfinity Internet and Comcast Business products and services, including speeds of 1.2 gigabits per second or more. Over the past three years, Comcast has added and upgraded nearly 10,000 miles of our network to connect homes and businesses across the United States, including in Kentucky, with plans to bring our next generation 10G network throughout the areas we serve in the Commonwealth. This growth is all part of the more than $20 billion investment Comcast made nationwide from 2018 to 2022 in our networks, which now cover more than 60 million U.S. homes and businesses.

Comcast participated in the Kentucky Better Internet Program ("BIP"). We filed five initial applications encompassing Adair, Breckinridge, Daviess, Hancock, and McCracken Counties. Comcast received valuable feedback through the robust challenge process, and we hope to continue looking at these projects and others during the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment ("BEAD") process.

Given Comcast's long and proven track record of success expanding broadband access and adoption in Kentucky, Comcast stands ready to partner with the Commonwealth in its digital equity efforts through a variety of existing programs. Comcast offers these comments to the Draft Plan in the spirit of continued partnership and looks forward to continuing this critical work to close Kentucky's digital divide.

Internet Essentials - Internet Essentials ("IE") is the largest and most successful broadband adoption initiative in the industry, connecting more than 10 million Americans to broadband Internet at home since launching in 2011. IE is designed to be a wrap-around solution that addresses the main barriers to broadband adoption. IE provides subscribers with access to broadband service at speeds of 50/10 Mbps for $9.95 per month or 100/20 Mbps for $29.95 per month (for IE Plus), access to millions of Xfinity WiFi hotspots, a wireless gateway at no additional cost, the ability to obtain low-cost or no-cost computers, unlimited data, and free digital skills training.[5] Notably, while the IE price of $9.95 per month has remained steady since the program launched, speeds for that service have increased seven times, including more than doubling during the early days of the pandemic.[6] Recognizing the critical need for Internet-ready devices in addition to a broadband connection, Comcast has distributed more than 200,000 free and subsidized laptops.[7] The IE program has been designed to eliminate barriers for financially constrained households and help more families benefit from home Internet access. To become an IE customer, there is no credit check required, no term contract requirement, and customers who do not have a social security number (or prefer not to provide their social security number) may provide other forms of identification to apply.

[5] See Internet Essentials, Comcast Corp., https://corporate.comcast.com/impact/digital-equity/internet-essentials (last visited Oct. 13, 2023).

[6] Recognizing the many challenges presented by the pandemic, eligible new customers received 60 days of free Internet service through IE during the pandemic. See, e.g., Press Release, Comcast Corp., Comcast Extends 60-Days of Free Internet Service to New Internet Essentials Customers (June 18, 2020), https://corporate.comcast.com/press/releases/comcast-extends-free-internet-service-new-internet-essentials-customers.

[7] Comcast Corp., Internet Essentials Progress Report 30, https://update.comcast.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/dlm_uploads/2022/06/IE-ProgressReport_6-23-22.pdf.

- Since 2011, nearly 36,000 low-income Kentucky residents in nearly 9,000 homes have connected to the Internet through IE.
- The top cities for IE connections include Paducah, Campbellsville, and Elizabethtown.

Comcast/Xfinity proudly participates in ACP with all tiers of Internet service the company offers, including two tiers (IE and IE Plus) that are fully covered by the $30 ACP benefit. Beyond connectivity, we work with tens of thousands of partners across the country, including nonprofits and city leaders, to support digital skills training to improve economic mobility. We offer free training through our IE Learning Center: Internet Essentials - Free Internet from Xfinity (xfinity.com), which features hundreds of modules on Internet basics, online safety, digital skills for everyday life, and advanced skill-building.[8] The content is curated from partners like Common Sense Media, Goodwill, CNBC, Women in Sports Technology, and more. In addition, Comcast has partnered with several experts, including ConnectSafely, Older Adults Technology Services ("OATS"), and Council for Opportunity in Education, to develop printed digital skills curricula that are distributed to thousands of community partners free of cost. These include several online safety toolkits for seniors and students, discussion guides for parents, and our Jurassic World Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math ("STEAM") curricula. Comcast has long invested in nonprofit partners focused on digital skills via the Comcast NBCUniversal Foundation, to help provide skills-building, job training, and other career development offerings for the full spectrum of learners, from elementary, middle and high school students to adults. Locally, these organizations include Mission Hope for Kids, Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club of Paducah, and Easterseals West Kentucky.

According to a recent study, "Wired and Hired: Employment Effects of Subsidized Broadband Internet for low-Income Americans," published in the American Economic Journal, IE customers make an average of $1,385 more per year and are 8 percent more likely to be employed than those eligible for but not connected through IE.[9]

Digital Equity Challenges and Opportunities

Barriers to Broadband Adoption. Both longitudinal research and empirical evidence demonstrate that the primary barriers to broadband adoption extend beyond affordability and include perceived relevance and digital readiness, among others:[10]

Perceived Relevance. A significant population of Americans who have not yet adopted home broadband do not recognize the relevance of such connectivity. The National Urban League ("NUL") Lewis Latimer Plan explains that perceived relevance may be tied to a lack of awareness and understanding of the Internet's uses and capabilities, in addition to the necessary skills needed to use it.[11] NTIA's Internet Use Survey data showed that 58 percent of the 21 million offline households indicated no interest in or need to be online.[12] Moreover, a 2021 Pew Research Center survey found that 71 percent of non-broadband users say that they would not be interested in an at-home broadband connection.[13] These numbers help demonstrate why education for and outreach to the unconnected and newly connected regarding broadband and its associated benefits is imperative for closing the digital divide.

Digital Readiness. Digital readiness is "the sum of the technical skills and cognitive skills people employ to use computers to retrieve information, interpret what they find, and judge the quality of that information" and "the ability to communicate and collaborate using the Internet."[14] Digital readiness challenges impact different parts of people's lives, including the use of developing technologies, online educational resources,

[8] Internet Essentials Learning Center, Xfinity, https://www.xfinity.com/learn/internet-service/internet-essentials/learning (last visited Oct. 13, 2023).
[9] George W. Zuo, Wired and Hired: Employment Effects of Subsidized Broadband Internet for Low Income Americans, 13 Am. Econ. J.: Econ. Pol'y 447 (Aug. 2021), https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pol.20190648.
[10] See National Urban League, The Lewis Latimer Plan for Digital Equity and Inclusion 53 (2021) ("NUL Lewis Latimer Plan") https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/NUL%20LL%20DEIA%20033021%20Latimer%20Plan_vFINAL_11AM.pdf (noting that "[e]xtensive public and private surveys suggest that, since 2010, there are three principal causes of the adoption gap, broadly speaking: problems of affordability, digital readiness, and perceived relevance").
[11] See id. at 61.
[12] NTIA, Switched Off: Why Are One in Five U.S. Households Not Online? (Oct. 5, 2022), https://ntia.gov/blog/2022/switched-why-are-one-five-us-households-not-online.
[13] Andrew Perrin, Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2021, Pew Research Center (June 3, 2021), https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/06/03/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2021/.
[14] NUL Lewis Latimer Plan at 60.

and telehealth capabilities.[15] While the U.S. workforce has high demand for digital skills, many workers, especially workers of color and those without higher education, lack these skills.[16]

Other Adoption Barriers. Other adoption barriers pertain to information and language, distrust, and structural issues tied to poverty. Information and language barriers may pertain to individuals determining program eligibility, parsing an application process, and setting up devices and services. Addressing language barriers is important for Comcast, which is why IE call center agents can help IE applicants in more than 240 languages, in addition to American Sign Language.[17] Distrust may pertain to biases against free services and government programs, as well as uncertainty about additional costs and privacy concerns.[18] Structural barriers may include complicated housing situations, such as recent moves, housing insecurity, or plans to relocate.[19] Comcast recognizes that just like there is not a single solution to addressing broadband adoption, the underlying challenges are also not monolithic.

Bridging the Adoption Gap. Empirical evidence demonstrates that community outreach and engagement – by digital navigators, community-based organizations, community anchor institutions, faith-based leaders, and other trusted voices – is vital to overcoming complex adoption barriers.

To this end, Comcast has been investing for more than a decade to expand digital equity and inclusion in Kentucky, including through community outreach and engagement efforts. Project UP is our comprehensive initiative to advance digital equity and help build a future of unlimited possibilities. Backed by a $1 billion commitment to reach tens of millions of people, Project UP encompasses the programs and community partnerships across Comcast, NBCUniversal, and Sky that connect people to the Internet, advance economic mobility, and open doors for the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs, storytellers, and creators.[20]

Project UP encompasses a number of longstanding and new initiatives in collaboration with local communities, including:

Digital Navigator Programs. Digital navigators are a powerful and proven tool to aid broadband adoption. Digital navigators are typically hired volunteers or staff from trusted community institutions – such as libraries, social or public service agencies, and community-based organizations – who can assist users in overcoming barriers to adoption in a tailored manner.

Digital navigators can address the relevance of broadband by demonstrating benefits like access to information, telehealth capabilities, and introduction to upskilling programs that serve as pathways to education, employment, and more. A recent Boston Consulting Group ("BCG") study supported by Comcast surveyed 1,500 people who have participated in programs with digital navigators and found that 65 percent of respondents were able to obtain Internet connectivity or a connected device, and 85 percent of respondents now use the Internet more frequently.[21] The same research demonstrates that the benefits of digital navigators extend beyond individuals obtaining Internet access – almost 50 percent of respondents obtained better health care; more than 40 percent of respondents received support for essentials like food, rent, and housing; and more than one in three respondents found a new job or secured higher incomes.[22] Given the importance of digital navigators, in 2022 alone, Comcast has invested $11.4 million in more than 225 nonprofits to support digital navigator programs across our service areas.[23] Comcast currently partners with organizations in Kentucky to create and support digital navigator programs, including Mission Hope for Kids.

[15] Id. at 61.

[16] Broderick Johnson, National Skills Coalition Report: We Must Close the Digital Skill Divide, Comcast Stories (Feb. 8, 2023), https://corporate.comcast.com/stories/national-skills-coalition-report-close-digital-skill-divide.

[17] Press Release, Comcast Corp., Comcast Commits to Investing $1B Over Next 10 Years to Reach 50M Low-Income Americans With Tools and Resources to Succeed in Digital World (Mar. 24, 2021), https://corporate.comcast.com/press/releases/comcasts-internet-essentials-program-hits-ten-year-mark.

[18] Matt Kalmus et al., Boston Consulting Group, A Human Approach to Closing the Digital Divide 3, 4, 8 (June 13, 2022) ("June 2022 BCG Study"), https://mkt-bcg-com-public-pdfs.s3.amazonaws.com/prod/how-to-close-digital-divide-with-human-approach.pdf.

[19] Chris Goodchild, et al., Boston Consulting Group, Boosting Broadband Adoption and Remote K-12 Education in Low-Income Households 6, 12 (May 12, 2021), https://mkt-bcg-com-public-pdfs.s3.amazonaws.com/prod/accelerating-broadband-adoption-for-remote-education-low-income-households.pdf.

[20] Project UP, Comcast Corp., https://corporate.comcast.com/impact/project-up (last visited Oct. 13, 2023).

[21] See June 2022 BCG Study at 2, 15.

[22] Id. at 15.

[23] See Broderick Johnson, ACP Week of Action: Comcast's Commitment to Affordable Connectivity for All, Comcast Stories (June 14, 2023), https://corporate.comcast.com/stories/acp-week-of-action-comcast-commitment-affordable-connectivity-for-all.

Additionally, investing in digital navigators will provide individuals from all racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds with the opportunity to learn more from members of their own communities about the ways in which broadband-connected technology can be relevant to their lives. Research from BCG revealed several other key findings, including that (1) trust and relationship-building are key to reaching disconnected communities; (2) familiar outreach channels are most effective at getting learners in the door; (3) one-on-one attention is often most effective, especially for learning fundamental skills; (4) resource-sharing and local coordination can minimize burdens on individual digital navigators; and (5) digital navigators are the trusted voice on the ground for understanding community needs.[24] These solutions address the main barriers to broadband adoption, as described above, and increase digital opportunity for all Kentuckians.

Digital Skills Programs. As digital navigators play a critical role in helping members of Covered Populations overcome adoption barriers,[25] a related component of successful digital adoption efforts is programming to help people develop digital skills once they are connected. Comcast works with organizations that provide skills building, job training, and other career development offerings for the full spectrum of learners, from high school students to adults.

A February 2023 report from the National Skills Coalition and Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta indicated that 92 percent of jobs available today require digital skills, yet almost one-third of U.S. workers lack opportunities to build these skills.[26] Jobs that require even one digital skill can earn an average of 23 percent more than jobs requiring no digital skills, which translates to an increase of $8,000 in annual income.[27] Developing these digital skills is not only a value add for individual workers, especially for workers of color, but a benefit to the larger U.S. economy.

Comcast supports digital exploration initiatives that teach individuals the basic skills needed to increase competency and confidence in using technology, spark interest in technology careers, and prepare individuals for the jobs of the future through early exposure to technology fields, in-school and after-school programming, technology and computer science programs, and soft skills training. In Kentucky, this includes Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club of Paducah.

Comcast RISE. Through Comcast's Representation, Investment, Strength, and Empowerment ("RISE") program, we awarded more than $110 million in monetary and in-kind support to 13,000 small businesses owned by women and people of color hard hit by the pandemic in more than 1,300 cities across 38 states, including Louisville's Dark Horse Branding and Serene Nights Candle Co. and Elizabethtown's NXT 1UP Academy Baseball and Softball.[28]

Lift Zones. Comcast, together with nonprofit partners and city leaders, has created more than 1,250 Lift Zones in community centers nationwide, including at Mission Hope for Kids in Elizabethtown and Oscar Cross Boys and Girls Club of Paducah. Along with free Internet connectivity, Lift Zones offer hundreds of hours of free educational and digital skills content. Not only are 50 percent of low-income households in major Comcast markets within walking distance of a Lift Zone, 40 percent of users report that they would not have had Internet access without the Lift Zone, and 58 percent report that the Lift Zone reduces stress for studying, working remotely, and managing online tasks.

Internet Essentials Partnership Program. In addition to IE, the Internet Essentials Partnership Program ("IEPP") is designed to help accelerate Internet adoption and provides the opportunity for school districts and other organizations to fund and quickly connect large numbers of students and families to broadband access.

ACP Support. Among other significant investments in affordability initiatives, Comcast is committed to promoting ACP. Comcast has supported and/or co-hosted nearly 900 ACP sign-up events nationwide since October 2022, resulting in thousands of ACP enrollments. These events have taken place at senior centers, back-to-school fairs, public housing facilities, festivals, fiestas, and in parks.

[24] June 2022 BCG Study at 22-23.

[25] The Digital Equity Act defines "Covered Populations" to include (1) individuals who live in low-income households; (2) aging individuals; (3) incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility; (4) veterans; (5) individuals with disabilities; (6) individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy; (7) racial and ethnic minorities; and (8) rural inhabitants. See NTIA, Digital Equity Act of 2021; Request for Comment, 88 Fed. Reg. 13101, 13102 (Mar. 2, 2023).

[26] Broderick Johnson, National Skills Coalition Report: We Must Close the Digital Skill Divide, Comcast Stories (Feb. 8, 2023), https://corporate.comcast.com/stories/national-skills-coalition-report-close-digital-skill-divide.

[27] Id.

[28] Comcast RISE, Comcast Corp., https://corporate.comcast.com/impact/comcast-rise (last visited Oct. 13, 2023).

Other Initiatives: Accessibility. Comcast remains focused on helping members of Covered Populations, including individuals with disabilities. In addition to accessible technology innovations such as the X1 Voice Remote and the Xfinity Adaptive Web Remote,[29] Comcast supports several partner organizations including Easterseals West Kentucky. In addition, the Comcast NBCUniversal Foundation recently awarded a $1.3 million two-year grant to Easterseals to expand digital literacy training for young adults with disabilities enrolled in Easterseals employment programs.[30] Students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities ages 16 to 24 will be trained on how to navigate the Internet, communicate through email, create PowerPoint presentations, prepare resumes, use assistive technology, and more.

Final Thoughts

Comcast encourages Kentucky to focus on digital equity efforts that will be the most impactful, including digital navigators, digital skills training programs, and partnerships. Comcast believes that partnerships are paramount to advancing digital equity efforts because closing the digital divide starts at the local level by meeting people where they are and responding to their specific needs. Communities win when the private sector, government, and community organizations join forces to achieve shared goals. To that end, Kentucky should create an inclusive framework that allows many organizations to participate directly in grant programs and that fosters such participation through partnerships and coalitions. As Comcast's more than a decade of dedicated digital adoption and community engagement efforts demonstrate, the private sector has been a critical partner in facilitating digital equity efforts to date. Kentucky's Digital Equity Act implementation should seek to amplify and scale the efforts of these existing successful relationships and ensure that the private sector continues to be a force multiplier for public funding.

Thank you again for the chance to offer our thoughts on the Commonwealth's Draft Plan. Comcast looks forward to continuing to work with the Office of Systems Equity as it refines its Digital Equity Plan.

Response

ELC appreciates the depth and breath of Comcast's commitment and investment supporting digital equity. We would like to partner with you to encourage your partners in this space to complete the Asset Inventory questionnaire. In addition. We want to affirm our continued commitment to offer grant opportunities in the capacity building phase and implementation phases. We applaud your ACP efforts and look forward to partnering with you in targeted communities that you provide service.

Commenter's Name: Kenneth S Luzzatto
Commenter's Organization: Student Freedom Initiative
Commenter's Title: Broadband Lead
Commenter's Email Address: kluzzatto@studentfreedominitiative.org

Relevant Section of the Plan: 2.1.2 Our Mission

Provided Feedback: Observation: The overall vision of the Digital Opportunity Plan encompasses the key dimensions of digital opportunity that must be addressed to close the digital divide in the state of Kentucky. The Plan outlines six major objectives related to digital opportunity, as well as the strategies proposed to achieve each. We commend Kentucky for including objectives and associated strategies tied to the challenges disproportionately faced by the state's covered populations. The state could consider further measures in enabling community participation in the planning and implementation of these objectives.

[29] Accessibility, Comcast Corp., https://corporate.comcast.com/impact/accessibility (last visited Oct. 13, 2023).
[30] Press Release, Easterseals, Easterseals Announces Two-Year Grant of $1.3M From the Comcast NBCUniversal Foundation (June 7, 2023), https://www.easterseals.com/news-and-stories/press-releases/easterseals-announces-2.html.
[31] Id.

Recommendations:

Consider community input and engagement in addition to data sharing with the Office of Broadband Deployment. Strategy 1 of Objective 1 discusses data sharing regarding covered populations. However, service estimation and aggregated public data sources may not always capture gaps in broadband or device access. For this reason, SFI has engaged with HBCUs to gauge accessibility and affordability in surrounding communities through town halls and surveys. Insights from these outreach efforts are enclosed to provide further context on the specific challenges faced by covered populations in the communities surrounding HBCUs.

Consider implementing feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and community forums. In addition to key performance metrics outlined in Section 5, Kentucky may also consider creating opportunities for feedback from covered populations to continuously gather input and measure the effectiveness of the Plan's strategies in addressing the challenges they are facing and potential solutions directly from the community

Other Feedback: Recommendations:

Consider community input and engagement in addition to data sharing with the Office of Broadband Deployment. Strategy 1 of Objective 1 discusses data sharing regarding covered populations. However, service estimation and aggregated public data sources may not always capture gaps in broadband or device access. For this reason, SFI has engaged with HBCUs to gauge accessibility and affordability in surrounding communities through town halls and surveys. Insights from these outreach efforts are enclosed to provide further context on the specific challenges faced by covered populations in the communities surrounding HBCUs.

Consider implementing feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and community forums. In addition to key performance metrics outlined in Section 5, Kentucky may also consider creating opportunities for feedback from covered populations to continuously gather input and measure the effectiveness of the Plan's strategies in addressing the challenges they are facing and potential solutions directly from the community.

Relevant Section of the Plan: 2.2 Alignment with Existing Efforts to Improve Outcomes

Provided Feedback: Observation: The Plan aligns the objectives outlined in Section 2 with Kentucky's broader goals around economic and workforce development outcomes, educational outcomes, health outcomes, civic and social engagement, and the delivery of other essential services.

Other Feedback: Recommendation:

Engage a broader group of stakeholders for alignment and implementation. One of the key goals outlined in the Plan is to advance digital literacy and workforce development to ensure all Kentuckians have access to digital skills needed for a 21st -century workforce. We commend Kentucky for recognizing that educational institutions are well-positioned to be partners in expanding workforce development and internet access for students. HBCUs are particularly well-positioned to address challenges related to digital literacy due to their proximity to covered populations in surrounding communities.

Kentucky should expand on and directly name the specific HBCUs that will be involved in the effort to expand digital skills credentialing and advanced IT certifications. For example, HBCUs may be included as partner organizations with the ELC's Kentucky Career Center to offer Kentuckians opportunities for skills development. The Student Freedom Initiative (SFI) has engaged HBCUs to learn of their potential involvement in workforce coalitions within the state to determine the path forward. Partnerships like these exemplify how HBCUs can serve as implementation partners to support education and training programs related to digital upskilling.

Consider adopting a series of state-funded high-technology workforce development programs to address the additional workers needed per year to build infrastructure. As highlighted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in a 2022 study, thousands of additional workers would be needed to build infrastructure defined by the result of funding released by 8 recent broadband programs, depending on the pace at which these programs provide funding. Given the demand for additional workers, targeted funding programs through public-private partnerships could support a robust, targeted digital literacy and workforce development program offering training in areas such as cybersecurity, technical support, and software engineering (Arkansas has developed a similar initiative, Arkansas Fiber Academy: https://www.arkansascc.org/arkansasfiberacademy).

1 - Telecommunications Workforce: Additional Workers Will Be Needed to Deploy Broadband, but Concerns Exist About Availability, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022 (https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105626.pdf)

2 - The 8 programs include Broadband Equity and Access Deployment Program, Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, Capital Projects Fund, Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, ReConnect Program

Relevant Section of the Plan: 3.1.1 Digital Inclusion Assets by Covered Population

Provided Feedback: Recommendations:

Consider an additional strategy of providing increased opportunities for device use and access in public spaces (e.g., device loans from libraries).

Objective 2 outlines a goal to ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians addresses increased pathways for device ownership. Expanding usage opportunities in public spaces accessed by community members may be a complementary effort. 46% of individuals believe there are no nearby public computers readily available (See Figure 1). 16% of individuals indicated interest in expanded programs for device access in public spaces (See Figure 2). Additionally, 36% indicated interest in programs for rental, refurbished or discounted priced devices, suggesting programs to expand device access may have a high impact in HBCU surrounding communities (See Figure 2).

Consider further tailoring the strategies and key activities to the needs of covered populations. Families in low-income households, individuals living with disabilities, and aging individuals are disproportionally facing gaps in access, connectivity, and digital skill building. As referenced in the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum, across all Kentucky HBCU communities, 22 – 42% of families have incomes that are over 150% below the federal poverty line, relative to the 23% state average (See Appendix B of the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum).

The Plan cites supporting statewide efforts of enrollment into the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) as a strategy to achieve Kentucky's goal of increasing digital adoption rates in the state. A key activity within this strategy is to leverage statewide contacts to increase ACP awareness. This is essential for covered populations. As referenced in the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum, in communities including aging individuals, members of racial or ethnic underrepresented minorities, low-income households, and individuals living with disabilities, up to 25% indicated that they are currently eligible for ACP but are not enrolled (See Figure 3). Statewide contacts should be further defined by Kentucky to include organizations that serve these covered populations.

Relevant Section of the Plan: 3.2.1 Barriers for Covered Populations, Adoption and Affordability

Provided Feedback: SFI would like to highlight the nuances of the communities surrounding the state's HBCU communities regarding digital opportunity and how this can be considered in Kentucky's approach to closing the digital divide. SFI is holding joint town halls with Kentucky HBCUs and has gathered survey input from over 100 community stakeholders.

The lived experiences of residents, businesses, local government, faith-based, and other organizations provided a qualitative layer to the quantitative data analyses.

Increase broadband adoption in HBCU communities and prioritize building infrastructure in low-income communities.

38 – 48% of households in Kentucky's HBCU communities do not subscribe to broadband internet compared to 34% across the rest of the state, suggesting a significant gap in connectivity (See Appendix B of the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum). This gap is compounded by the number of unserved and underserved locations that remain unfunded by federal programs. For the surrounding area around Kentucky State University, this is as high as 100% of unserved and underserved locations in the community (See Appendix B of the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum). Many individuals in these communities are unsatisfied with their current internet, with the main reasons being that it is too expensive, too slow (e.g., pages take too long to load), or has unreliable service (e.g., frequent outages). For those without internet access, the main reason is that individuals find the current cost too expensive (See Figure 4).

Drive positive impact in HBCU communities through affordability levers. Many of the households in communities surrounding HBCUs are likely to be facing affordability challenges. For example, 42% of Simmons College of Kentucky's surrounding community lives on less than 150% of the federal poverty level, which is more than 2x the state average of 20% (See Appendix B of the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum). ACP enrollment within Kentucky HBCU surrounding communities is higher than the state average of 45% – Kentucky State University's enrollment is 54% and Simmons College of Kentucky at 49% (See Appendix B of the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum). However, there is still opportunity to further increase uptake amongst the remaining ~50% of eligible households in these communities. Up to 41% of respondents who are formerly incarcerated, living with a disability, from low-income households, or part of racial or ethnic underrepresented minorities find the cost of internet connection to be unaffordable. Respondents would consider <$30/month affordable, which is less than half of the state average cost of $72.94/month, as stated in Section 3.1.5 (See Figure 5). 57% of respondents shared interest in a program that would assist in the costs associated with internet service, demonstrating potential impact for expansion of low-cost internet programs.

Enhance device access in HBCU communities.

As Kentucky recognizes, the lack of device access is one of the primary barriers for internet adoption among racial and ethnic underrepresented minorities, veterans, and individuals living with disabilities. HBCU communities are less likely to have access to internet-compatible devices – in Simmons College's community, 40% of households do not have desktops/laptops vs. 28% across the state and 21% nationally – indicating potential demand for widely accessible and inexpensive options (See Appendix B of the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum). Individuals may also face challenges in finding available devices free of use in the community.

While most households own at least 1 computing device (ranging from 88-93% of households), there is opportunity to increase the share with access to a laptop/desktop computer—for example, in the surrounding community of Simmons College, approximately 60% of households in these communities own a computer compared to the state average of 72% (See Appendix B of the SFI KY Public Comment Addendum). Further, 17% of respondents shared that they have insufficient devices to address their current needs, suggesting potential impact for programs that can expand device access in these communities.

Relevant Section of the Plan: 4.1 Coordination and Outreach Strategy

Provided Feedback: Recommendation:

Consider deepening partnerships with HBCUs in the state. Kentucky State University is listed in the Digital Equity Core Workgroup. Simmons College is mentioned within the Plan as a facilitator for the NTIA Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program Grant. Kentucky may consider providing additional funding to create a similar program to the NTIA CMC grant program, that would include both Simmons College and Kentucky State University. Funds could be directed to upgrading and expanding the fiber and wireless infrastructure on the respective campuses (public Wi-Fi hot spots) and creating digital navigator immersion community outreach programs with college students as instructors. As mentioned before, HBCUs are in a strong position to provide broadband & high-tech specific job training programs to their local

communities that would assist in developing deeper cooperation, relationships, and partnerships with each HBCU targeting covered populations, which may be highly represented in the surrounding communities.

HBCUs may be able to help advance several of Kentucky's outlined objectives, given their central role in their surrounding communities. This positions them well to expand opportunities for public device access, disseminate information about state and local government programs, and offer opportunities for civic and social engagement for covered populations. In addition to being central to the community, HBCUs can serve as a partner in planning and enhancing educational programs targeted towards internet safety, digital literacy, and workforce development. Kentucky may consider deepening its existing relationships with Kentucky State and Simmons College to expand their current credential and certification offerings and provide these opportunities to residents of their respective communities.

Response

ELC appreciates the recommendations submitted by the Student Freedom Initiative. The Commonwealth of Kentucky has undertaken the following activities:

- convened a 14-stop listening tour to gain insights into the needs of the covered populations and key stakeholders across the state;
- held over 400 stakeholder meetings;
- conducted a statewide residential survey that yielded 2,478 responses;
- engaged trusted statewide community partners to conduct 17 focus groups with lived experts in the covered populations;
- collected over 144 responses to an asset inventory identifying digital equity services across the Commonwealth;
- established a state core team with representation from all the covered populations (including Kentucky State University); and
- led a strategic planning session with the core team, trusted community partners and key stakeholder groups.

The recommendation regarding securing resources to support workforce development programs in this area are reflected under Objective 6 and ELC has secured a number of federal grants to assist in broadband workforce development efforts and other critical infrastructure talent needs.

Objectives 1 and 2 address public device access through community anchor organizations like public libraries. We have taken your feedback regarding more tailored strategies under advisement, and you will see it reflected throughout the plan including the impact measures. Also, your comments regarding how to reach/impact all the covered populations through targeted investments will be taken into consideration as we invest in capacity building and implementation plan actions. We were honored that KSU accepted our invitation to serve on the state core team. We welcome deeper partnerships with KSU and Simmons College.

ELC concurs with your desire that grant funds be invested wisely in sustainable activities that go beyond the Digital Equity funding provided to the Commonwealth. Your comments regarding the timeline are well received and the final version of the plan will reflect both short and long-term timelines by objective and strategy. Finally, your additional insights into HBUCs and their student population will be critical as we make investments in the future.

Commenter's Name: Karisa Tashjian
Commenter's Organization: Digitunity
Commenter's Title: Director of Programs
Commenter's Email Address: karisa@digitunity.org

Relevant Section of the Plan: 5.1 Implementation Strategy & Key Activities

Provided Feedback: As a national nonprofit organization focused on the device ownership aspect of digital equity, we are delighted to see the inclusion of devices within Kentucky's Digital Equity Plan. This is a watershed moment for advancing digital equity. We offer this feedback as a means to share our unique perspective, leveraging nearly 40 years of work on the issue of device ownership, a national lens into how states are approaching the issue, and our role in administering a nationwide practitioner network. We are truly and sincerely vested in your success.

We would like to emphasize four overarching points:

Large screen device ownership: Owning a computer is crucial for thriving in the modern economy. Those without a computer are unable to harness the vast opportunities that the internet provides, such as employment, education, telehealth, commerce, finance, communication, and much more. Everyone who needs a computer should have one.

Personal device ownership provides a unique computing experience that cannot be replicated through public use of computers or shared devices. Large screen devices such as laptops, desktops, Chromebooks, and tablets, are critical for a full and equitable computing experience. While smartphones are often more affordable than the upfront cost of a computer, evidence shows the use of smartphones alone may limit the range of one's online activity and depth of overall digital skills.

Ecosystem approach: To ensure that all residents of Kentucky are able to obtain a free or low cost computer, establishing a robust supply of applicable devices through accessible, resilient, community-level distribution systems is critical. Systems thinking is required, with active involvement from a diverse range of actors and stakeholders. Digitunity's Methodology for a Sustainable Device Ecosystem provides a framework for addressing this issue on a large scale.

Sustainability: While short-term gains are possible, our collective efforts must aim for sustainable solutions that far outlast this five-year federal investment. Building a plan around merely making grants to procure devices would be shortsighted, missing this landmark opportunity to create comprehensive change. Instead, we must develop solutions that transform the way corporate, government, and institutional IT assets are managed at scale. Repurposing previously used technology for community support can make computer ownership more accessible. Technology reuse is a practical and environmentally friendly solution for expanding device ownership.

Device quality and intended use: Affordable devices must be reliable; quantity cannot replace quality. It is also critical that the choice of device matches a recipient's intended use and context. While less expensive devices may be a quick win within a limited budget, a healthy device ecosystem will provide economical solutions that meet the full range of recipients' needs.

Regarding Kentucky's plan, we offer the following specific feedback and recommendations:

Kudos!: The plan's goal to "ensure access to affordable devices for all Kentuckians" and creating "a sustainable device ecosystem in alignment with local digital equity plans, particularly in areas with low device ownership" is excellent. We are impressed with the amount of attention that support for devices received in the plan and a clear commitment to addressing this need. We're also thrilled to see interest in refurbished computers, particularly including nonprofit technology refurbishing organizations as part of the ecosystem.

Public access/loaning vs. owning: It appears that most of the 66 assets identified in the state's Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory related to devices are mainly referencing public access labs. While leveraging intermediate, "stopgap" measures such as loaning programs and computer labs may be necessary, true equity is when residents have full access to devices that meet their particular needs. Device ownership makes that possible. Public access computing spaces require transportation to get there, they are limited to the days and times that they are open, and often restrict the time allotted to each user session.

Supply is critical: Generating a robust and ongoing supply of technology is necessary for a sustainable device ecosystem. This supply can be sourced through donations from individuals, corporations, government, and other organizations. Efforts such as a statewide campaign to drive donations from Kentucky's corporate sector would be extremely helpful, as well as exploring how state government surplus or out of service computers can be leveraged. Digitunity has deep knowledge regarding the generation of supply, and can be utilized as a resource.

ACP: The "take rate" for devices in the Affordable Connectivity Program has been extremely low, particularly because many internet service providers don't offer devices as part of the program. Moreover, the devices that are offered through the ACP subsidy are often low grade tablets. Other approaches to offering a device subsidy have stalled in Congress. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the state on the proposed approach of "applying for waivers from FCC for non-providers to purchase devices for the ACP program and recoup a portion or all device cost through the program/voucher."

Learn and earn: There are a variety of approaches for qualifying and validating a resident's need for a no cost or low cost computer. We caution against tying a resident in need's participation and evidence of proficiency in a digital skills program with being able to receive a computer. By working with community organizations that serve Covered Populations, it is possible to ensure that they are in need of a device and will use it effectively. Of course, having digital skills training readily available for those who are interested in enrolling is ideal.

Workforce opportunity: We're very heartened to see the consideration of refurbishing technology as a workforce development program for state residents to increase the State's capacity and also create a pipeline of technology talent. Refurbishing has a low entry point for staff, can be a robust career ladder to family sustaining wages, and may come with its own set of funding sources such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to support the work on an ongoing basis.

Support for device deployment: Device deployment to Covered Populations involves a multi-step, multifaceted process. Specific training and support should be provided to entities that are tasked with providing devices to Covered Populations. Intentional effort should be placed on developing a deployment network through community-based organizations, with formalized connections made between device sources in populated hubs and rural deployment points. While public libraries are often thought of in this role, many libraries played this role during the pandemic (via federal Emergency Connectivity Funds) and found that they were ill-equipped and not interested in further serving as deployment partners in the future. It will be important to ensure that deployment partners are interested, have the capacity, and are trained and supported in this role.

Refurbishing: While nonprofit technology refurbishers are mentioned in the plan, we are not aware of any that are located in Kentucky or are part of Digitunity's nonprofit technology practitioner network, known as the Alliance for Technology Refurbishing and Reuse (AFTRR). Refurbishing is a key component of a device ecosystem and necessitates a strong emphasis on technical skills and expertise, particularly to guarantee the secure handling of data. It also requires working with certified vendors to ensure that e-waste is responsibly handled and that the entire process is financially viable. It's important to note that in December 2022, Digitunity spearheaded the effort to pass the federal Computers for Veterans and Stud....

Response

The feedback provided is encouraging to our systematic approach to a sustainable ecosystem including training for device distributors and refurbished. The comments about large screen devices is acknowledged. ELC will access the framework referenced in the comments and will take it into consideration as the Commonwealth makes investments in the capacity building and implementation grant processes. We welcome the opportunity to partner with your organization with Kentucky's seven refurbishers as well as other areas of our plan.

Commenter's Name: Louie Lujan
Commenter's Organization: Compudopt
Commenter's Title: Government Relations Manager, National
Commenter's Email Address: louie.lujan@compudopt.org

Relevant Section of the Plan: Engaging Stakeholders to Implement Plan

Provided Feedback: On behalf of Compudopt, a nationally recognized 501c(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to ending the digital divide, we appreciate the opportunity to offer our input and insights on your DEA plan, and commend your commitment to bridging the digital divide in Kentucky. Our mission is to provide equal access and education to under-resourced youth and their communities. Since our founding in 2007, Compudopt has delivered over 262,000 hours of technology education and distributed over 63,000 computers to more than 67,000 households, impacting nearly 225,000 individuals across the United States. In 2023 we will be serving 39 cities across 18 states nationwide.

At Compudopt, we believe in the transformative power of technology and have championed the cause of connectivity, digital access, skill development, and empowerment. By reaching out to underserved students and their communities, Compudopt has helped bridge the digital divide by opening doors to education, employment and opportunity. Our work underscores Compudopt Our unwavering commitment to create a more equitable and connected society, one individual at a time.

Compudopt has a history of program delivery in Kentucky, having served more than 1,000 underserved citizens. In Lexington, we served 188 families and over 3,000 in Covington. These programs have not only provided access to computers but have also equipped individuals with the essential digital skills needed in today's increasingly interconnected world. By reaching out to underserved citizens, Compudopt has helped bridge the digital divide; it has opened doors to education, employment, and hopefully ignited hope in the hearts of those it has touched. Our work in Kentucky underscores Compudopt's unwavering commitment to create a more equitable and connected society, one individual at a time.

The Kentucky Draft State Digital Equity Plan points out that stakeholder engagement and collaboration is the key to success. Specifically, the plan requires collaboration with key stakeholders and other community anchor institutions that are connected and able to act in the community. As a community anchor, Compudopt's mission is to provide technology access to underserved youth and communities. Our programs eliminate limited access to computers, close the digital divide and improve digital literacy skills. We help provide no or low cost high-speed internet options and support the future of youth and their communities.

Compudopt National Population Served:

2022 Households Served: 22,456

2022 Individuals Served: 70,437

87% of students we serve are economically disadvantaged (based on their eligibility for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program).

Almost 75% are considered at risk of dropping out of school.

Approximately 66% of the students we serve are Hispanic, 25% are African American, 5% are white, 2.5% are Asian/ Pacific Islander, and less than 1% identify as more than one race.

52% female/48% male

Compudopt Environmental Sustainability Impact:

Each year 6.9 million tons of e-waste are produced in the US and 80% of e-waste ends up in landfills, leaching toxic metals into the environment. Since Compudopt was founded in 2007, we have kept over 665 tons of waste out of those landfills through our programs and recycling partnerships. By receiving donated retired equipment, refurbishing it, and giving it a second life in the home of a student or family, we have created a resourceful solution for improved environmental sustainability while giving youth the tools they need for a brighter future.

Computer Adoption:

We host community-based events to distribute recently retired corporate computers that have been reconditioned. Our distribution events are highly efficient, allowing us to distribute hundreds of devices in just a few hours. We hold distribution events in various locations, bringing devices to the neighborhoods that are most in need and eliminating barriers of time and transportation. The computers are free to recipients. To qualify for a computer, a family must. must not have access to a working computer at home and must have a child in pre-K-12 education (up to age 26). Families are then selected to receive a computer through a lottery system. Computers come with 2-years of free tech support. Compudopt has been in the device access and digital inclusion sector for over 15 years with an evidence-based record of successfully deploying tens of thousands of computers to under-resourced communities across the country. To satisfy the demand for devices, Compudopt has developed the internal capacity to collect, refurbish, and redistribute surplus and retired computers from several physical sites in the U.S. Our distribution events serve as more than a means to give away computers. The events are rallying points for the neighborhoods we serve. We welcome other community organizations to attend as part of their outreach to low-income families, and we invite volunteers from local businesses and corporations.

Adult Education:

Technology is critical for adults to further their education. Many adults rely on online opportunities to complete diplomas, certifications, and degrees while balancing work schedules and children. With a computer in the home, a parent can pursue a GED, certification, or degree, laying the groundwork for greater economic mobility for themselves and their families.

STEM Education:

Children and adults must be prepared for a 21st-century workforce that is steeped in technology. According to the World Economic Forum, STEM careers are highest paying and offer the greatest stability with low unemployment rates. Technology education creates opportunities for students to enter the technological job market, experience greater economic mobility, and bring their skills to the workforce. Yet technology education is disproportionately lacking among under-resourced families. Schools address some technology education, but for many, their capacity to do so depends on their individual campus budgets. Many schools in low-income neighborhoods simply do not have enough funding to offer the robust technology programming found in more affluent neighborhoods. The very skills that could lift a child out of poverty are the skills that low-income children are least likely to access.

Economic Mobility:

Access to computers and technology education can drive a family's economic mobility by opening opportunities for parents and children. A parent's work schedule might prevent them from pursuing a diploma or degree, or from seeking better-paying job opportunities. With a computer in the home, a parent can access online education and apply for jobs. For children, access to a computer and digital education opens an array of career opportunities in technology and innovation. According to the World Economic Forum, STEM careers are highest paying and offer the greatest stability with low unemployment rates. According to Understanding Houston, computer and mathematical occupations are among the fastest growing in our area, increasing by 45.5% between 2010 and 2017. These occupations also rank among the highest-paid. This job market demand can be an exit route for families living in poverty. To advance in the 21st-century workforce, one must have access to technology and possess some digital literacy. Employment applications are online; resumes are created and sent electronically; jobs require an understanding of e-mail and basic software; and most positions with opportunities for advancement require some work from home. A critical gap exists for low-income families. Many do not have computers in their homes and have not been taught basic technology skills. This lack of access and knowledge is the digital divide – the disparity between those who have and those who have not.

Basic Needs

Due to transportation barriers or work schedules, low-income parents often struggle to find time to pay bills in person, atten

Other Feedback: Other Comments:

We collaborate with other community partners, school districts, charter networks, and local government is an important part of the successful delivery and execution of work. While we believe our programs and service is meaningful and impactful independently, we also highly value our role in the greater ecosystem of support. We are one piece of the puzzle which can help lift individuals out of poverty, level the playing field, and deliver opportunities that change the future for at-risk youth in underserved or low-income communities. Partners provide students, space, and referral opportunities for students who may benefit from additional support services, such as college and career success programs. We have active and evolving partnerships in place across the country with YMCA, KIPP, Yes Prep, Boys and Girls Clubs, Communities in Schools, Genesys Works, PerScholas, YearUp, BridgeYear, and a myriad of other community-based organizations and school districts local to the communities in which we work.

Response

Thank you for sharing the capabilities of Compudot and your organization's experience. We encourage you to complete the Asset Inventory questionnaire. In addition, we would welcome an opportunity to partner in the capacity building and implementation phases of our plan.

Commenter's Name: Joshua Butler

Commenter's Organization: Human I-T

Commenter's Title: Senior Policy and Advocacy Manager

Commenter's Email Address: joshua.butler@human-i-t.org

Relevant Section of the Plan: 2 Introduction and Vision for Digital Equity

Provided Feedback: On behalf of Human I-T I would like to thank the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the Education and Labor Department for undertaking the task of developing the state Digital Equity Plan and seeking public comment. Though a requirement, the proposal, and public input, will serve as an important blueprint for constructing a bridge to bring Kentuckians across the digital equity gap and ensure that they thrive once they have arrived. Our organization looks forward to supporting your efforts

Other Feedback: With more than a decade of experience providing digital inclusion services, Human I-T is the country's leading digital equity practitioner and nonprofit refurbisher of electronics and technology. We strongly support Kentucky's declared goal of ensuring that all Kentuckians have access to reliable high-speed internet and the right devices to access that technology while also ensuring necessary resources are allocated to identify barriers to affordability and ensuring there is training and support available.

We believe access to technology is a right, not a privilege, and that the following best practices are critical to best bridge the digital divide:

Holistic Digital Navigation: Focus on addressing all aspects of digital inclusion, including connectivity, access to devices, digital skills, and technical support. Provide comprehensive support to individuals or communities to ensure they have the necessary resources and knowledge to fully participate in the digital world.

Assisted at Time of Call, Not 'Air Traffic Control': Be responsive and proactive in assisting individuals seeking support. Instead of acting as a controlling authority, aim to provide personalized assistance in real-time, addressing their specific needs and challenges, with solutions in-the-moment rather than pushing them to make additional phone calls or visit additional websites.

Culturally Competent Services: Recognize and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds and identities of the communities served. Tailor services to meet the unique needs and preferences of different cultural groups, ensuring that everyone feels included and valued.

Collaborative Process with Trusted Partners: Foster partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), local governments, educational entities, and other trusted stakeholders. Work together to identify and address digital inequities, leveraging collective expertise and resources to achieve more significant impact.

In-person and Remote Support through Various Communication Channels: Offer both in-person and remote support options to accommodate different circumstances and preferences. Utilize multiple communication channels, such as phone, email, chat, or video conferencing, to ensure accessibility and convenience for individuals seeking assistance.

Public/Private Partnerships will be vital to success. We encourage the Commonwealth of Kentucky to work with partners such as Human I-T and other organizations with the experience of working with municipalities to close the digital equity gap. We look forward to seeing the digital equity gap close and the plan being put forward is a big step in that direction.

Response

ELC appreciates Human I-T sharing best practices based on its experience in this field. The Commonwealth's DE plan is rooted in these approaches as well. Please know that we will incorporate them in the capacity building and implementation phases of our work and investments in this space. We welcome the opportunity to partner with your organization and encourage you to complete the Commonwealth's Asset Inventory questionnaire.

Second Public Comment Period January 4-February 8, 2024

Commenter's Name: Iris O'Donnell Bellisario

Commenter's Organization: Lead for America – American Connection Corps.

Commenter's Email Address: irisodonnellbellisario@ lead4america.org

Relevant Section of the Plan: 5 Implementation

Provided Feedback: We are pleased to offer comments to the Kentucky digital equity plan. We offer these comments from our perspective as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and national AmeriCorps program that currently places digital inclusion AmeriCorps Members in 28 states. We look forward to continuing our expansion into Kentucky and currently have or had members in the following sites:

- Kentucky Office of Broadband Development
- Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) Inc.
- Partners for Rural Impact - Kentucky (Promise zone counties)
- Partners for Rural Impact - (Clay County) - Thompson scholars
- Red bird Mission

Role of digital navigators:

Nearly 20% of Americans lack a broadband connection or digital device at home according to the 2020 US Census (Kalmus, 2022). The Boston Consulting Group studied digital navigator programs over a few years and found from a survey of over 1,500 people that digital navigators can increase the effectiveness of digital equity programs (Kalmus, 2022). With support from a digital navigator, over 65% of survey respondents were able to obtain internet access, computer or tablet at home, and over 85% reported using the internet more (Kalmus, 2022). This illustrates the crucial role that digital navigators play and we need to continue to support these roles across Kentucky.

We are excited to see that the plan consistently identified the need for digital navigators. One specific example on page 73 mentions the plan's intention to collaborate with workforce agencies in developing statewide digital navigator programming stood out to us.

We would like to see the following changes implemented to support digital navigators

Develop dedicated support lines to assist community members with digital literacy skills such as: identifying scams and cybersecurity risks on personal devices, access patient portals for medical treatment or communication, submitting job applications and much more.

- Support the development of a standardized digital navigator curriculum and assessments
- Expand the capacity of digital navigators with added funding
- Support knowledge sharing between digital navigators that are existing and new digital navigators
- Develop & provide increased financial support for outreach campaigns
- Invest in research & evaluation to improve existing program design and closely measure impacts

Role of nonprofits & community organizations

Local nonprofits serve as a trusted, community resource which can be easily accessed by members of the community. We appreciate that the plan acknowledges that nonprofits and community organizations play a key role in terms of engagement and distribution of materials related to digital equity. We also appreciate the plan's intention to leverage non profits & community organizations to develop "culturally sensitive materials" in different languages and formats. On page 162, the plan highlights Comcast's partnership with 225 nonprofits throughout Kentucky. In addition the digital inclusion asset inventory was incredibly helpful in identifying organizations and how they are eligible for the digital equity grant & the work the organizations are already completing. This was highlighted on pages 96-121. Many individuals already accessing a nonprofit's services may also be eligible for federal/state broadband programs. It's important to acknowledge that nonprofits can be a crucial resource in capacity building. Digital navigators can be placed within nonprofits in the community.

In order to reach this capacity, we'd like to see the following additions to the plan:

- Expanded financial resources to hire and train staff to serve as digital navigators
- We'd like to see the plan incorporate leveraging nonprofits to educate communities on financial resources to assist with the cost of internet, similar to the affordable connectivity program (ACP)
- Encourage incorporation of digital upskilling into existing workforce development programs
- Emphasis on rural communities

As with all digital equity plans, rural communities are listed as a covered population. We appreciate the plan's awareness of the rural vs. suburban vs. urban divides. We'd like to emphasize that the American Connection Corps connects AmeriCorps members to rural and legacy communities across the country and can serve as a resource during the implementation of the digital equity plan in Kentucky.

Other Feedback: On behalf of Lead for America (LFA) and our American Connection Corps (ACC) program, we would like to take this opportunity to thank your office and the Governor for prioritizing digital inclusion opportunities strategically in your state, particularly in regards to reaching rural and underserved communities and incorporating more boots-on-the-ground approaches through non-profit and community partnerships and Digital Navigator models like the American Connection Corps.

We have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of the American Connection Corps and AmeriCorps on individuals and communities alike. We applaud the historic investment to enhance digital equity efforts afforded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Implemented strategically, these funds will reduce and eliminate historical, institutional, and structural barriers to technology access and use. We greatly appreciate your and the NTIA's leadership and comprehensive approach to designing and implementing the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program and the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program, which will significantly increase and improve the direction of resources dedicated to removing systemic barriers and providing equal access to opportunity.

Boots on the ground capacity

There is an increasing need for boots-on-the-ground capacity building in rural and legacy communities and we believe that the American Connection Corps model has proven successful in helping to meet this need and can be used as an example for expanding and improving Kentucky's digital opportunity plan implementation. The plan highlights that boots-on-the-ground support can help with reaching the covered populations (page 6). On page 31, volunteers are listed as a crucial network to ensure populations receive affordable, accessible internet and services such as digital skilling classes.

Since 2021, ACC has successfully graduated 75 AmeriCorps members, who have hosted over 360+ digital skill-building workshops and community forums, and launched 75+ public-private partnerships. As a result of these members' service they have enrolled 6,500+ households into the American Connectivity Program (ACP) Benefits and channeled $45,503,609 to local communities. We appreciate that on page 40 of the Kentucky Digital Equity Plan, Volunteer Kentucky (VNH) is listed as a resource to integrate AmeriCorps and VISTA volunteer programs with capacity building initiatives, but we hope additional emphasis will be placed on partnering with the ServeRI state service commission as well as other AmeriCorps programs such as ours to build a talent pipeline and critical capacity for these efforts.

We would like to emphasize that AmeriCorps Members can be strategically recruited and leveraged to help communities build capacity for digital inclusion. Several of our current & former host sites are currently listed as non-profits working on digital equity in the plan. For example in 2023, Lead for America implemented a groundbreaking public private partnership with the state of Massachusetts and Comcast to provide Digital Navigators to nonprofits and regional planning organizations statewide by placing 15 American Connection Corps members across the state of Massachusetts. Read more about this innovative partnership approach to digital navigation here: https://masstech.org/news/mbi-comcast-partners-to-expand-broadband-adoption.

Workforce Ecosystem

The plan states that their ecosystem approach relies on systems thinking, active involvement, and stakeholder engagement. The plan references Digitinuty's Methodology for a Sustainable Device Ecosystem on page 168 as a framework to develop their own ecosystem. In addition we'd like to see the plan discuss leveraging existing partnerships such as workforce development organizations and community action agencies that can host digital literacy classes. We'd also like to see the plan emphasize the importance of on-the-grounds programs to support the initiative. In addition we'd like to see some additional information added regarding the intersection of workforce boards and WIOA, as well as how community service block grants can provide guidance on digital support programs and the DEA program.

ACC appreciates the opportunity to provide these comments to Kentucky and looks forward to continued engagement. Please contact Iris O'Donnell Bellisario, if you need additional clarification on the letter's recommendations.

Thanks, Iris O'Donnell Bellisario, Digital Equity Specialist, Lead for America - American Connection Corps

Response

Thank you for your thoughtful feedback, we have taken the opportunity to review and look forward to ongoing partnerships with organizations like the ones listed. As we continue to build out the digital equity website, we will have resources dedicated to cyber security, digital skills and resources. Identified within the plan are strategies that address resources (Obj 5 Strat 4) of which digital navigators is included. Thank you for bringing to light the need to further clarify our position. In addition, digital navigation achievements through publicly available resources, such as WIN Career Readiness and others will be a cornerstone for implementation. We are committed to ongoing research to identify existing curriculum that is available and encouraging its use to build the ecosystem

We too value cybersecurity and developed an Objective specifically to address the concerns (Obj 5 Strat 2). Safety while using the internet and providing resources to those seeking assistance is an important component of the plan. Ongoing efforts to promote cybersecurity and connect people to resources will be part of communication and outreach efforts. Developing the workforce ecosystem is the responsibility of the Education and Labor Cabinet/Department of Workforce Development. The commitment is evident across the Department, within the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Office of Adult Education, Jobs for Veterans State Grants, Office of Employer and Apprenticeship Services. Upskilling the emerging and existing workforce is a measure of success for all agencies and will be for Digital Equity as well. Recognizing the needs of rural and legacy communities we worked to ensure representation throughout the plan. Stakeholders like the Kentucky Nonprofit Network and others will be fully engaged in our Statewide Digital Equity Summit and will be committed partners throughout our work. We appreciate the feedback and look forward to expanding our partnerships with organizations like, LFA, ACC, AmeriCorps, VNH and others as we move forward. Of the observations you shared, we recognize their importance and acknowledge they are areas we can continue to build upon and will do so as capacity building and implementation funds are available.

Appendix X. Kentucky Residential Technology Survey

Kentucky Residential Technology Survey
Thank you for taking this survey. We appreciate you taking time to help us understand the Digital Divide. Sharing your experience will give us the information we need to continue to improve the digital experience for all Kentuckians.

We are asking households across the Commonwealth a series of questions about your experiences and challenges with accessing and using high-speed internet and related technologies.

This survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Only one response per household, please.

It is important for you to know that we will not use or share any data collected for any marketing purposes. We will not sell any information collected through this outreach. We will not share individual information with any outside entity without the express written consent of the individual. No personally identifiable information, responses, or information that could be used to identify an individual and their survey responses are shared with any entity without the consent of the individual.

Are you age 18 or older?

- Yes
- No

Do you live in Kentucky (in a location you own or rent} at least six months out of the year?

- Yes
- No
- * If you answered no to either of the previous questions, we are only collecting responses from Kentucky residents age 18 and older. Thank you for your interest in this survey.

Do you, or does anyone in your household, own a cell phone?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

On that cell phone, do you subscribe to a plan that allows you to access the internet?

This is sometimes referred to as a “data plan.”

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
- N/A

Does anyone in your household have a computer?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

What type of computer do you have at home? Please select all that apply:

If you do not have a computer at home, select N/ A.

- One or more desktop computers
- One or more laptop computers
- One or more tablet computers, like an iPad
- N/A

Please share with us the main reason why you don’t own a computer:

If you do own a computer, select N/A.

- Computers are too expensive
- You don’t need a computer
- You use computers at a different location
- Computers are too complicated
- You have a cell phone that you use instead of a computer
- You have an illness or physical condition that makes it difficult to use a computer
- You don’t want a computer in your home
- N/A
- Other - Please specify:

Does your household have internet service that you can access on at least one computer?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Which of the following describes the internet service or services you subscribe to at home?

Please select all that apply:

- Dial-up
- DSL service, usually provided by a telephone company
- Cable modem, usually provided by a cable TV company
- Fixed wireless broadband, connecting to the internet through an outdoor antenna
- Satellite internet service
- Fiber to the home
- Internet service through a mobile or cellular phone
- Unsure
- N/A

To the best of your knowledge, what is the advertised bandwidth or download speed provided to your home by your internet service provider?

This information can usually be found on your internet bill.

- Dial-up
- Less than 10 Mbps
- 10 Mbps to 24 Mbps
- 25 Mbps to 49 Mbps
- 100 to 249 Mbps
- 250 Mbps to 499 Mbps
- 500 Mbps to 999 Mbps
- 1 Gbps to 1.9 Gbps
- 2 Gbps or faster
- Unsure
- N/A

And what do you pay each month for your home internet service? If you bundle your internet service with other services, such as TV or phone, please indicate only the cost of your internet service.

- Less than $20
- Between $20 and $39
- Between $40 and $59
- Between $60 and $79
- Between $80 and $99
- Between $100 and $124
- Between $125 and $149
- Between $150 and $174
- Between $175 and $199
- Between $200 and $224
- Between $225 and $249
- $250 or More
- Unsure
- N/A

What is the main reason why you do not have the internet at home? Is it because...

If you do have internet at home, select N/A.

- You don’t own a computer that can access the internet
- You don’t need the internet
- The internet is too complicated
- Internet service is not available at your address
- The monthly cost of internet service is too expensive
- You can get internet access someplace else, like work or school
- Concerns about fraud, identity theft, or other security risks
- You use a smartphone to do everything you need to do online
- The cost of installation and set-up is too expensive
- N/A
- Other - Please specify:

Are you familiar with the program called the Affordable Connectivity Program where eligible households can get reduced cost computers or reduce their monthly internet bills?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe – I've heard of programs like this, though not by this name
- Unsure

Does your household participate in the Affordable Connectivity Program?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Do you use the internet from any locations outside of your home?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

At what locations outside of your own home do you use the internet?

Please choose all that apply:

____ At work
____ At the library
____ At a community center
____ At someone else's home
____ At school
____ Restaurants or coffee shops
____ Airports
____ Hotels
____ On a cell phone or handheld device
____ At a Kentucky Career Center
____ N/A
____ Other - Please specify:

In the past 12 months, which of the following activities have you or someone in your home conducted using the internet?

	On a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer	On a smartphone or mobile device	Both
Communicate through email or other ways of sending messages			
Access or search for government services			
Search or apply for jobs			
Search for medical or health care information			
Communicate with your doctor or other health care professionals			
Online banking or paying bills			
Read online newspapers or other news sources			
Take online classes			
Conduct research or do homework for school			
Advertise or sell products or services			
Apply for public benefits and/or assistance (e.g., unemployment insurance, SNAP, TANF, etc.)			

These last few questions are for classification purposes only.

What is your age?

- 18 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 59
- 60 to 64
- 65 to 69
- 70 or older

Please share with us how many people live in your home, including yourself:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11 or more

Do you have any children age 17 or younger living in your household?

- Yes
- No

Has anyone in your household ever served on active duty in the United States armed forces, either in regular military, National Guard, or military reserve?

- Yes
- No

Are you currently employed? This could include part-time, full-time, or contract work.

- Yes
- No

Do you ever use the internet to work from home or some other location instead of commuting to your workplace during normal business hours?

This is often called “teleworking” or “telecommuting.”

- Yes
- No

Which of the following categories best describes the total annual household income earned by all wage earners in your household?

- Less than $19,300
- $19,300 to less than $26,100
- $26,100 to less than $32,900
- $32,900 to less than $39,750
- $39,750 to less than $46,500
- $46,500 to less than $53,400
- $53,400 to less than $60,200
- $60,200 to less than $67,000
- $67,000 to less than $73,800
- $73,800 to less than $80,600
- $80,600 or More

In terms of your gender, how do you identify?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe:

Are you, yourself, of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin or descent?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following race (or races) do you consider yourself to be?

- White
- Black or African American
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Native American, Eskimo, or Alaska native
- Other - Please specify:

Do members of your household typically speak English while at home, or some other language?

- English
- Some other language
- Some household members mainly speak a language other than English
- Unsure

Do you have any long-term physical, mental, or emotional conditions that make it difficult to do tasks such as walking or climbing stairs; concentrating, remembering, or making decisions; visiting a doctor's office or shopping by yourself; dressing; or bathing?

- Yes
- No

Are you blind or have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?

- Yes
- No

Are you deaf or have serious difficulty hearing?

- Yes
- No

And finally, could you please share the five-digit ZIP code of your current address?

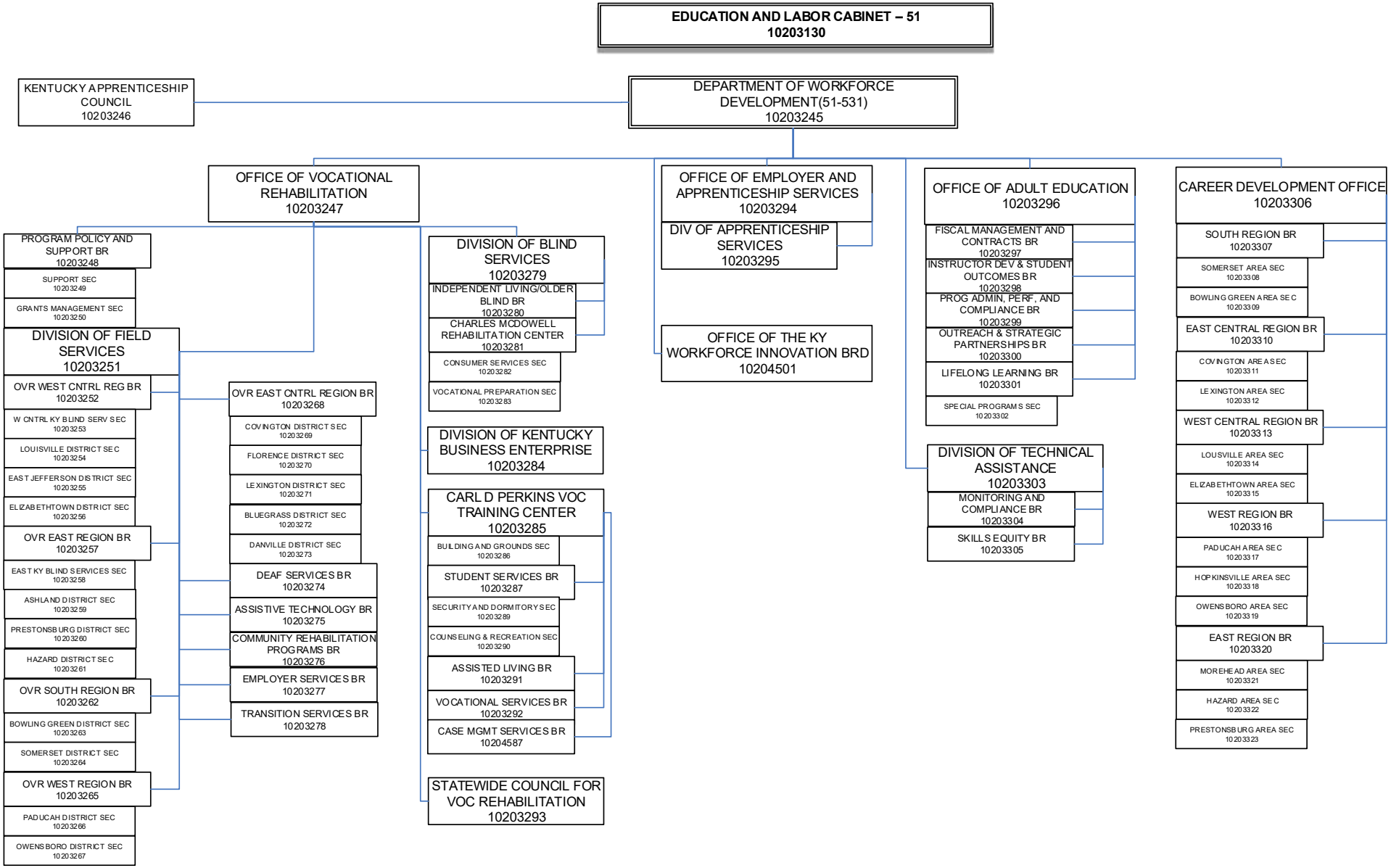
Thank you for completing our survey.

Your answers will help the Commonwealth as we strive to close the Digital Divide.

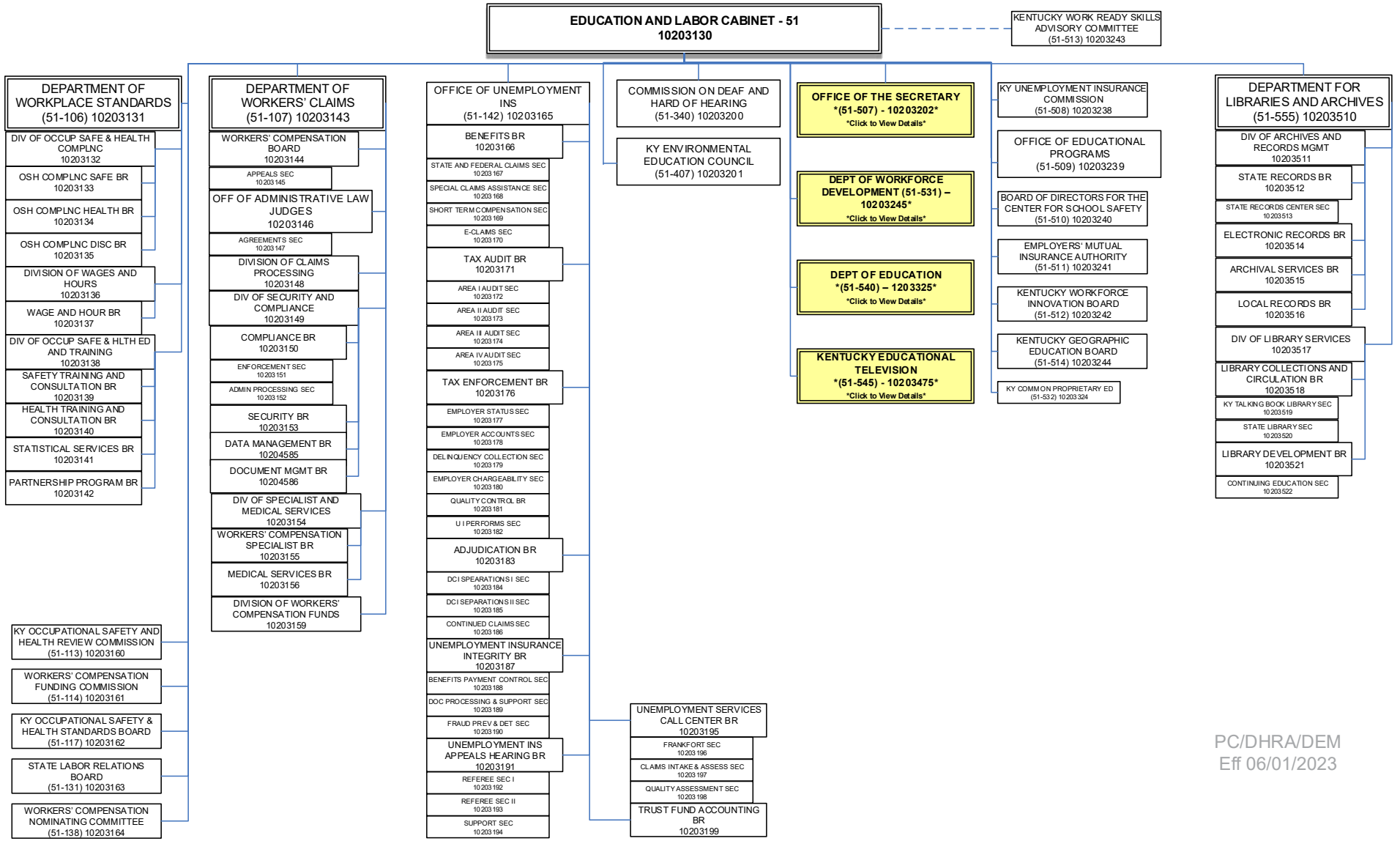
If you would like to learn more about this effort or read the upcoming report, you can follow our progress at https://digitalequity.ky.gov.

Powered by ArcGIS Survey123

Appendix XI. Department of Workforce Development Organizational Chart



Appendix XII. Education and Labor Cabinet Organizational Chart



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