



NOFO SUMMARY

State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program- The subject of this NOFO—the **\$60 million State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program**—is part of the Digital Equity Act’s larger State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program, the purpose of which is to promote the achievement of digital equity, support digital inclusion activities, and build capacity for efforts by States relating to the adoption of broadband by residents of those States.

By creating their own State Digital Equity Plans, States can, among other things, identify barriers to digital equity and outline specific measures aimed at addressing those barriers. States that develop State Digital Equity Plans will then be able to apply for funds from the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program to implement those plans.

Key Dates

- Complete applications from States (including the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico) must be received through the NTIA application portal (<https://grants.ntia.gov>) **no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on July 12, 2022.**
- The Letters of Intent may be submitted (1) through the NTIA application portal or email (digitalequity@ntia.gov) no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on July 12, 2022 or (2) by mail or courier, postmarked (for postal mail) or showing clear evidence of having been mailed (for courier submissions) no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) on July 12, 2022.
- **NTIA expects to complete its review, selection of successful applicants, and award processing by September 15, 2022.** The earliest start date for awards under this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is September 29, 2022. NTIA may issue awards made under the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program on a rolling basis.

Funding Opportunity Description

- The State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program is part of the larger State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program, the purpose of which is to promote the achievement of digital equity, support digital inclusion activities, and build capacity for efforts by States relating to the adoption of broadband by residents of those States.

Anticipated Amounts

- Grant awards to States are formula-based and will depend on the number and characteristics of States that apply. Amounts available to the non-State entities described above will be based on the criteria outlined in this NOFO and, in the case of Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities and Native Hawaiian organizations, will depend on the total number of applicants.
- The total amount appropriated by Congress for the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program (including administrative costs) is \$60 million, and the total amount appropriated for State Digital Equity Capacity Grants in fiscal year 2022 is \$240 million.

Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program

- NTIA strongly encourages States and territories to concurrently participate in the State Digital Equity Planning Grant program and the BEAD program.
- Just as the Digital Equity Act begins with funding for the creation of Digital Equity Plans, the BEAD Program, which is the subject of a separate Notice of Funding Opportunity, begins with a Five-Year Action Plan and an Initial Proposal, each of which must include descriptions of a participant's plans to advance digital equity and inclusion.
- States and territories should take a holistic approach to developing their BEAD Five-Year Action Plans and their State Digital Equity Plans, recognizing that they have a unified objective of closing the digital divide.
- Specifically, NTIA expects that the Five-Year Action Plans and Initial Proposals developed for the BEAD Program will fully incorporate the State or territory's Digital Equity Plan.
- Each state and territory should, therefore, ensure that those tasked with developing the State Digital Equity Plan, the Five-Year Action Plan, and the Initial and Final Proposals for the BEAD Program are working closely to meet the programs' shared objectives.

Project/Award Period

- As established in Section 60304(c)(3)(D)(ii) of the Infrastructure Act, the award period for the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program is one year, beginning on the date on which the grantee is awarded the grant funds; provided, however, that the award period may be extended by NTIA, in consultation with the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) Grants Officer, for up to 180 days based on a written request from a recipient. An applicant may submit a request for an extension of the one-year award period not later than ninety (90) calendar days before the end of the award period.

Statutory Formula and Mandates

- The amount awarded to each eligible State will be calculated by applying a formula in which:
 - (a) fifty (50) percent of the total grant amount shall be based on the population of each State in proportion of the total population of all eligible States;
 - (b) twenty-five (25) percent of the total grant shall be based on the number of individuals in each State who are members of the "covered populations" listed in Section 60302(8) of the Infrastructure Act, in proportion to the total number of individuals in all eligible States who are members of covered populations; and
 - (c) twenty-five (25) percent shall be based on the comparative lack of availability and adoption of broadband in each State relative to all eligible States, as determined by data collected from the annual inquiry of the Federal Communications Commission pursuant to Section 706(b) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the American Community Survey, NTIA Internet Use Survey, and any other source that the Assistant Secretary, after appropriate notice and opportunity for public comment, determines to be appropriate.

Challenge Process

- A State may challenge the amount allocated to it as determined by the funding formula. Any State that wishes to challenge the tentative award amount listed above shall submit a letter to

the Assistant Secretary, through the NTIA programmatic contact listed in Section VII.A of this NOFO, signed by the governor or equivalent official, within fourteen (14) calendar days of publication of this NOFO.

- The letter shall describe, in as much detail as practicable, the error or other defect that the State believes to have occurred in NTIA's application of the formula or statutory requirements. The Assistant Secretary will make a determination and respond to the State in writing within twenty-one (21) calendar days of receipt of the letter.
- In the event that the Assistant Secretary determines that a recalculation of formula amounts is appropriate, the Assistant Secretary will promptly notify the other States of this occurrence and of the results of any amendment to award amounts for all States.

Cost Sharing or Matching

- The Infrastructure Act authorizing the establishment of this program **does not contain a statutory non-federal cost sharing or matching funds requirement**. Accordingly, NTIA will not require an eligible applicant applying for a financial assistance award under this program to provide a nonfederal cost contribution and will not give additional consideration during the evaluation process for applications proposing non-federal cost share.

State Digital Equity Plan Requirements

Statutory Requirements:

1. Identification of barriers to digital equity faced by Covered Populations in the State.
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.
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.

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;
- k. Public housing authorities in the State; and
- l. A partnership between any of the entities described in clauses (a) through (k).

5. A list of organizations with which the Administering Entity for the State collaborated in developing the Plan.

Additional Requirements:

In addition to the above requirements, the State Digital Equity Plan developed with planning grant funds shall, at a minimum, include the following:

- 1. A stated vision for digital equity;

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. An asset inventory, including current resources, programs, and strategies that promote digital equity for each of the covered populations, whether publicly or privately funded, as well as existing digital equity plans and programs already in place among municipal, regional, and Tribal governments;
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;
5. A description of how municipal, regional, and/or Tribal digital equity plans will be incorporated into the State Digital Equity Plan;
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;
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;
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;
9. A timeline for implementation of the plan; and
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.

Review Process - Initial Eligibility and Administrative Review

- NTIA's Program Office staff will conduct an initial eligibility and administrative screening of submitted applications to ensure that the applicant is eligible to receive funding under the program and has submitted a complete application. Applications not submitted by an eligible applicant will be eliminated from further review. NTIA may continue the review process for an application that is timely submitted by an eligible applicant but that is missing certain information or documentation required by this NOFO. In such cases, NTIA may ask the applicant to provide any missing or incomplete materials during this initial review.

Merit Review

- Once an application is deemed eligible and complete, NTIA's program office will initiate a merit review, to be conducted by at least one merit reviewer who is technically and professionally qualified to conduct the review. Merit reviewers may be federal employees or non-federal persons. As applicable, merit reviewers will be required to sign and submit a nondisclosure and confidentiality form pertaining to the dissemination of confidential information and to potential financial and other conflicts of interest.
- The merit reviewer(s) will review the application to ensure conformity with the program objectives, eligible activities, and related costs/budget as provided in Section 60304(c) of the Infrastructure Act and in this NOFO. The purpose of this review is to provide advice to the Selecting Official as to the technical soundness and merits of the application.
- During the merit review, NTIA may ask applicants to submit additional information to clarify or to further substantiate the representations made in their applications. In addition, if deficiencies are identified during the merit review, the applicant may be contacted by NTIA and asked to revise the application accordingly.

Selection Process

- The Assistant Secretary or his designee will serve as the Selecting Official and recommend approval of applications selected for funding based on the results of the review process in Section V of this NOFO. The final approval of selected applications and the issuance of awards pursuant to this NOFO will be made by the NIST Grants Officer, who serves as the Grants Officer for the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program. The award decisions of the NIST Grants Officer are final.