

Honorable Members of the Washington State House of Representatives and
Honorable Members of the Washington State Senate,

Please find attached the recommendations of the Digital Equity Forum (DEF). These recommendations, as required by RCW 43.330.5395, are designed to enhance digital connectivity throughout the state. Under the statute, the Office of Equity (EQUITY) and the Department of Commerce (Commerce) are required to jointly transmit the DEF's recommendations to the Legislature.

These recommendations are the product of the DEF and its representatives, and do not necessarily reflect the perspective of EQUITY, Commerce, or other state agencies.

EQUITY is proud of the 14 months during which we provided primary support for the work of the DEF. During that time, we were able to support the addition of further structure and representation to the DEF as it developed its recommendations. We are also proud of the way in which we ensured the DEF had a strong foundation for success as we transitioned primary support of the DEF back to Commerce, due to the sunset of relevant funding.

Commerce is grateful to the Forum members for their time and engagement with EQUITY and Commerce. The members prioritized the needs of communities. The Forum serves as a connection point between the community and state decision-makers.

Please contact DigitalEquity@Commerce.wa.gov with any questions about the DEF's recommendations and let us know if any additional information would be helpful from either of our agencies.

Sincerely,

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Washington State Office of Equity

Dave Pringle
Washington State Department of Commerce



Digital Equity Forum

Biennial report pursuant to RCW 43.330.5395

October 2025

Report to the Legislature

Director Joe Nguyễn

Acknowledgments

For people with disabilities, this report is available on request in other formats. Please call 360-725-4000 with your request.

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Executive summary

Authorizing legislation

The Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) and the Washington State Office of Equity (Office of Equity) support the Digital Equity Forum (DEF), its co-chairs and workgroups to advance digital connectivity in Washington as required by [RCW 43.330.5395](#) (Revised Code of Washington).¹ These agencies are jointly responsible for transmitting this report to the Legislature by Oct. 28, 2025, and every odd-numbered year thereafter.

DEF is directed to:

- Develop goals that are consistent with the goals of the Governor’s Statewide Broadband Office, as provided in [RCW 43.330.536](#)
- Strengthen public-private partnerships
- Solicit public input through public hearings or informational sessions
- Increase agency collaboration and communication between local, state and federal governments
- Recommend reforms to universal service mechanisms

Highlights

Since the [2023 DEF Legislative Report](#),² DEF’s 25 members:

- Voted on and approved DEF charter
- Appointed two co-chairs to lead
- Established a yearly calendar of whole group and workgroup meetings
- Identified 15 alternate DEF members for voting
- Created a membership application process to support adding ten new DEF members
- Developed a framework and calendar for the workgroups to develop recommendations for the legislative report

DEF recommendations for a path forward

DEF advances the vision laid out in [Washington’s Digital Equity Plan](#)³ through the legislative recommendations in this report, including:

- Integrate digital equity into state agency services
- Leverage the statewide Digital Equity Dashboard
- Establishing affordable connectivity and device subsidy programs
- Convene a statewide digital equity summit
- Empowering DEF to strengthen public, private and philanthropic partnerships.

As the [recommendations](#) detail, embedding digital equity in policies and procedures as a permanent component of public infrastructure will require:

- New use fees or revenue sources
- Dedicated recurring state appropriations
- Private and philanthropic co-investments
- Integration into agency budgets and workforce strategies

¹ [Washington Legislature, “Revised Code of Washington 43.330.5395.”](#)

² Washington State Department of Commerce, [“2023 DEF Legislative Report,”](#)

³ Washington State Department of Commerce, [“Washington’s Digital Equity Plan,”](#)

With federal funding uncertain and digital gaps widening, the Legislature has an opportunity to lead on digital inclusion. By advancing the recommendations in this report, the Legislature will integrate digital equity as a statewide priority, empower every resident to thrive in a connected world, and secure a resilient future – driving inclusive economic growth for generations to come.

Introduction

Background

The WSBO and the Office of Equity signed an interagency agreement transferring nearly \$1.3 million for the Office of Equity to conduct outreach and to support the DEF between April 2024 and June 2025. During this period, the Office of Equity led statewide outreach and engagement through social media, onsite events, videos and other strategies to reach individuals and households who are unserved by broadband access.

The administrative support for DEF was transferred back to the WSBO on July 1, 2025, along with DEF’s online presence to the Department of Commerce’s (Commerce) website.⁴

The four DEF workgroups – Intergovernmental Collaboration, Broadband Accessibility and Services, Data and Measurement and Public-Private Partnerships – presented their recommendations in this report during a DEF public meeting on Aug. 5, 2025. Digital Equity Forum’s membership voted and passed 23 recommendations.

Digital equity in Washington

Digital equity is no longer a standalone initiative – it is a foundational enabler of Washington’s most critical priorities, which includes education, health, economic development, public safety and workforce readiness. Recognized as one of the Determinants of Equity by the Legislature and the Governor’s Office, digital equity is one of the key factors that affect fairness. To make sure everyone in Washington can fully take part in civic and economic life, digital equity needs to be built into how government works and how services are delivered.⁵

This report presents a unified set of legislative, administrative and policy recommendations developed by DEF to advance digital equity across Washington. The recommendations are grounded in community-informed data, interagency collaboration and sustainable infrastructure.

The landscape and challenges

As a global leader in technology and innovation, Washington boasts one of the highest rates of household computer ownership in the nation. However, many people still lack reliable internet access. More than 167,000 households lack reliable broadband access. Over 75% of Washington’s 7.6 million residents face additional barriers that limit their ability to access the internet and fully participate. Low-income families, rural communities, older adults, people with disabilities, immigrants, refugees and justice-involved individuals are examples of covered populations described in the Digital Equity Plan that face persistent internet access challenges to digital information.^{6,7}

These barriers include, but are not limited to:

- Infrastructure gaps in rural, frontier and tribal lands

⁴ Washington State Department of Commerce, “[Digital Equity Forum webpage](#).”

⁵ Washington State Office of Equity recently replaced the term “Determinants of Equity” to “[Statewide Impact Area](#).”

⁶ Washington State Broadband Office, BEAD data, (2025),

⁷ Washington State Broadband Office, “[Digital Equity Plan](#),” (2023),

- Unaffordable internet plans that exclude low-income households
- Device shortages and limited tech support
- Limited digital literacy and training opportunities
- Fragmented support across agencies and sectors
- Generative AI as a literacy gap amplifier

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Washington has mobilized an estimated \$170 million in digital equity investments from federal, state and local sources. These one-time funds supported broadband access, device distribution, digital navigator programs and community-based digital literacy initiatives. Guided by Washington’s Digital Equity Plan, these efforts laid the foundation for an inclusive and equitable digital future for all.⁸

Despite these investments, Washington now faces a digital equity funding cliff that threatens to stall momentum and widen existing gaps.

Programs once funded by federal and state dollars are scaling back services or closing:

- Affordable Connectivity Program funding ran out and enrollment closed in 2024⁹
- The National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program was cancelled in May 2025¹⁰
- Washington’s Digital Navigator Program funding was cut on July 1, 2025¹¹

Federal disruptions – including declaration of the Digital Equity Act as “unconstitutional” – created a significant gap in the national digital inclusion strategy.¹² These developments threaten to stall momentum, disrupt the implementation of Washington’s Digital Equity Plan and widen disparities across the covered population and funding streams.

Recommendations

DEF’s four workgroups – Intergovernmental Collaboration; Broadband Accessibility and Services; Data and Measurement and Public and Private Partnerships – developed 23 recommendations that outline key barriers to digital equity and present a coordinated set of solutions using a four-part framework:

- **Policy (P):** Directives, for example, from the Governor’s Office to set strategic direction or priorities such as declaring digital equity a statewide priority
- **Legislative (L):** Actions to establish legal authority, allocate funding and create new programs such as enacting the Digital Equity Integration and Coordination Act
- **Administrative (A):** Actions to operationalize policy through WSBO and partner implementation such as launching a pre-qualified vendor roster or data sharing platform
- **Digital Equity Forum (D):** Actions assigned to DEF such as developing recommendations for the DEF legislative report

⁸ Washington State Broadband Office, “[Digital Equity Plan](#),”

⁹ Federal Communications Commission, “[Affordable Connectivity Program Consumer FAQ](#),”

¹⁰ Senator Patty Murray, Washington State Broadband Office, “[Digital Equity Advocates Slam Trump for Ripping Away Resources to Close Digital Divide](#),”

¹¹ Governor Bob Ferguson, “[Veto Letter](#),”

¹² President Donald J. Trump, “[post on Truth Social](#)” (May 8, 2025),

Recommendations by the Intergovernmental Collaboration Workgroup

Statewide coordinated action to advance digital equity

Requested action by the Legislature (L):

- 1) Reaffirm and fund Washington's Digital Equity Plan
- 2) Direct state government agencies to integrate digital equity into agency services
- 3) Create a state Digital Equity Interagency Council to enhance collaboration, improve efficiency and achieve better outcomes

WSBO should designate a staff member to coordinate interagency digital equity decision packages and agency request legislation (A). The Governor should reaffirm digital equity as the 15th determinant of equity (P). **Digital equity is not formally recognized as a statewide priority.** Agencies often rely on outdated department-specific mandates, which limits collaboration and weakens coordinated service delivery across government. This results in fragmented digital equity service delivery and governance structures leading to bureaucratic silos. This recommendation will deliver the following benefits:

Legislative action to advance digital equity

- Improved service delivery across agencies — integrating digital equity into agency operations ensures more inclusive access to public services, reducing barriers for underserved communities and enhancing overall program effectiveness.
- Strategic alignment and cost efficiency — a Digital Equity Interagency Council fosters coordination across agencies, innovation, streamlines resource use and minimizes duplication yielding better outcomes without increasing costs.
- Sustainable, statewide impact — reaffirming and funding Washington's Digital Equity Plan institutionalizes long-term commitment, enabling Washington to lead nationally in equitable digital access and innovation.
- Economic and social impact — coordinated digital equity efforts will expand access to digital skills training, boosting employability in high-demand sectors like technology and health care in rural and underserved areas.

Coordinated decision packages and agency request legislation

- Designate a WSBO staff member to lead and coordinate digital equity decision packages across agencies, streamline agency request legislation across statewide efforts, reduce repetitive effort and ensure consistent implementation of equity-centered frameworks. This role will embed accountability, accelerate cross-agency alignment and enhance the impact of digital equity investments.

Reaffirming the determinant of equity

- Reaffirming digital equity as the 15th determinant of equity signals sustained executive commitment, embeds digital inclusion into statewide equity frameworks and empowers agencies to prioritize access, literacy and infrastructure in service delivery. This action strengthens policy continuity and reinforces Washington's leadership in closing the digital divide.

Investment in data infrastructure to advance Washington’s Digital Equity Plan

The Legislature should fund digital equity enhancement led by WaTech to critical state social service platforms, including standardizing delivery mechanisms and standards (L).

Without unified data sharing protocols and shared platforms, agencies can struggle to coordinate services and measure outcomes effectively. This fragmentation leads to duplicative efforts, service gaps and inequitable resource distribution – especially for communities relying on multi-agency support. Legal and technical barriers stall coordination and integrated service design and delivery. These actions will deliver the following benefits for Washington’s Digital Equity Plan:¹³

Improved coordination across agencies

Unified Data Platform: Creating a centralized platform – modeled on successful systems like the HHS Coalition’s Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment (IE&E) Modernization Program or the City of Seattle’s CiviForm – enables seamless data exchange, breaking down silos and strengthens collaboration among agencies.¹⁴¹⁵

Streamlined Operations: Standardizing data sharing mechanisms – supported by agreements as guided by WaTech’s 2021 Data Sharing Agreement Implementation Guidance – to ensure agencies can coordinate efforts and align digital equity initiatives with Washington’s priorities.¹⁶

Enhanced service design and delivery

Data-Driven Insights: Modeling after the Homeless Management Information System managed by Commerce, centralizing data collection provides actionable insights, enabling agencies to tailor programs to specific community needs.¹⁷

Increased accountability and transparency

Mandatory Data-Sharing Agreements: Requiring grant recipients to execute data-sharing agreements ensures consistent reporting, enhances accountability and tracks progress toward digital equity goals.

Building a permanent funding framework to close Washington’s digital divide

The Legislature should establish permanent and robust state funding mechanisms to support digital equity efforts, such as:

- 1) Implement a \$2 excise tax on the retail sale of a smart wireless device with a selling price of more than \$250 (L).
- 2) Amend the State Universal Service Fund (RCW 80.36.650) to make state digital equity projects eligible for fund distributions (L).¹⁸
- 3) Authorize state agencies to use state funding for matching funds with federal and private grants (L). Additionally, fund a study on alternative, sustainable funding sources to support implementation of Washington’s Digital Equity Plan (L).

¹³ Washington State Broadband Office, [“Digital Equity Plan,”](#)

¹⁴ Washington Health and Human Services Enterprise Coalition (HHS Coalition), [“What is the Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment Modernization Program?”](#)

¹⁵ City of Seattle, [“Seattle’s CiviForm Tool named One of the 50 Most Transformative Smart Projects of 2023,”](#)

¹⁶ WaTech, [“Data Sharing Agreement Implementation Guidance,”](#)

¹⁷ Washington State Department of Commerce, [“Homeless Management Information System \(HMIS\),”](#)

¹⁸ The State Universal Service Fund was established to support telecommunications access in underserved areas (RCW 80.36.650),

No single agency or funding source can handle digital equity efforts alone – it takes teamwork and shared resources. Sustainability requires long-term investment and coordination across agencies. The recommendation identifies the following key areas to address the lack of sustainable funding mechanisms:

- Appropriating funds to a digital equity account
- Authorizing matching funds
- Integrating digital equity into agency coordination,
- Updating the State Universal Communication Service Program in RCW 80.36.650
- Conducting policy research with institutions like the Washington State Institute for Public Policy

Taking additional Operational steps such as competitive grant rounds, public dashboards and alignment with the Washington Digital Equity Plan’s needs analysis framework will deliver the following benefits:^{19 20}

Long-term financial stability

Dedicated Funding: Appropriating funds to a Digital Equity Opportunity Fund will create a stable, ongoing resource pool, address the barrier of exceeding single-agency capacity, or lack thereof, noted by the Washington Digital Equity Partners in the report, Digital Equity Funding Need Narrative.²¹

Extended State Universal Communications Service Program: Updating and expanding the scope of RCW 80.36.650 ensures continued support and a reliable funding stream for digital equity initiatives.²²

Attracting Investment: A well-researched funding framework not only draws private and philanthropic support, but also ensures long-term sustainability and room to scale digital equity initiatives.

Economic and social impact

Workforce and Community Empowerment: Sustainable funding helps expand digital skills training, supports Washington’s goal of universal broadband access, and boosts job opportunities and economic growth in rural, low-income and tribal communities.

Reduced Digital Divide: Ensuring long-term investment to sustain access to digital resources, bridging disparities and fostering social inclusion across Washington’s diverse population.

Strengthening communities through affordable connectivity and digital inclusion

The Legislature should establish affordable connectivity programs for Washingtonians experiencing economic insecurity by providing discounts and subsidies. Residents living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level should receive subsidies that cover 100% of the cost of connectivity (L).

Closing the digital divide in Washington by eliminating internet access disparities can make a measurable difference in the lives of all residents. Limited or no access can be caused by the inability to pay, the inability to navigate resources for the adoption of services, the lack of broadband infrastructure in certain areas, the lack of access to digital hardware, the lack of digital literacy or a combination of barriers prohibiting certain individuals from achieving digital access. This recommendation will deliver the following benefits:

¹⁹ Washington State Broadband Office, “[Digital Equity Plan](#),”

²⁰ Washington State Institute for Public Policy, “[Webpage](#),”

²¹ Washington Digital Equity Partners, “[Report on the Digital Equity Funding Need: The Cost of Addressing Digital Equity in Washington State](#),”

²² State Universal Communications Services Program, “[State Universal Communications Services Program Report](#),”

Access for all and economic mobility

- Fully subsidized connectivity for low-income households ensures equitable access to education, employment, and essential services. By reducing dependence on costly public interventions, this strategy unlocks long-term economic opportunity while delivering strong returns on investment.

Workforce readiness and digital inclusion

- Affordable connectivity empowers low-income individuals to participate in remote work, training and digital services – strengthening Washington’s workforce and reducing barriers to upward mobility. Affordable internet helps people get better jobs, earn more money, and build a path to a stronger financial future.

Health equity and public service access

- Subsidized internet access enables families to engage with telehealth, apply for benefits and access government services – leading to better health and faster, easier support from public agencies.

Public safety

- When low-income households have reliable internet, they can get emergency alerts, disaster resources and public safety communications – enhancing statewide preparedness and reducing response gaps within vulnerable communities.

Closing the digital divide for justice-involved individuals through infrastructure investment

The Legislature should fund digital infrastructure improvements, by investing in equipment and technology resources to make broadband internet and Wi-Fi readily available for justice-involved individuals (L).

Individuals experiencing incarceration or serving community supervision come from overwhelmingly poor communities and disproportionately communities of color. In addition to lacking educational and employment opportunities, these individuals face higher levels of homelessness, substance abuse disorders and struggle with physical and mental health disorders that are often undiagnosed or untreated.

These individuals face numerous compounding, systemic barriers to accessing the internet, devices and digital skills training due to being incarcerated and upon release into the community. By prioritizing improvements within living units, education classrooms, Correctional Industries programming areas and spaces where court hearings and telehealth appointments can take place, it closes the digital equity gap and supports individuals in fully participating in aspects of economic, social and civic life. This recommendation will deliver the following benefits:

Improved infrastructure and connectivity within prisons, jails, juvenile rehabilitation facilities and community-based carceral settings to enable broadband internet and Wi-Fi.

- Improved education and meaningful engagement beyond the classroom
- Increased training opportunities and work experience using industry-standard technology
- Expansion of the use of telehealth has a range of benefits that can improve the accessibility, convenience, and quality of health care for both patients and health care providers
- Improved access to essential services like banking, paying bills and government resources, to include social services
- Stronger connections with family and other support systems

Increased digital literacy training and other support for individuals incarcerated and individuals under community supervision or participating in partial confinement programs. Examples of training needed include:

- Basic operation of computer equipment and smartphones
- Basic instruction on how to use search engines and navigate government and other websites
- Accessing trusted online health information and medical records, telehealth, virtual care platforms and communicating with their community health care providers
- Logging onto a Wi-Fi network, emailing, messaging and participating in virtual calls
- Tools and processes needed to comply with community supervision and partial confinement program requirements
- Searching for jobs and completing online job applications
- Microsoft office, PDF reader, google workspace, LinkedIn, Zoom, Teams and other commonly used programs and smartphone applications
- Understanding cybersecurity practices, like avoiding phishing and other threats and creating strong passwords
- Digital financial literacy
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) Digital Literacy

Funding a statewide digital equity coalition for alignment, accountability and impact

Centralized planning and interagency coordination are needed to align efforts, optimize resources and ensure effective service delivery statewide (L). The Legislature should provide funding to convene an annual coalition. This coalition would include tribal governments, community and private partners. Its purpose is to assess progress, share best practices, and align program planning, digital equity goals, funding needs and policy priorities.

Many digital equity programs across Washington share grant program goals but often operate in isolation. While some foster local collaboration, many programs lack statewide coordination, resulting in fragmented data systems, inconsistent key performance indicators (KPIs), and limited sharing of best practices. Stakeholder engagement is uneven, and reporting structures vary, making it difficult to share information, assess impact or align program efforts.

A more formal communications infrastructure is needed to support cross-sector collaboration, shared accountability and scalable solutions. This recommendation will deliver the following benefits:

- State funding for an annual digital equity gathering – bringing together practitioners, individuals with lived experience, tribal nations, agencies and partners from the private and philanthropic sectors – would foster local collaboration and statewide coordination.
- This convening enables centralized planning, interagency alignment, and the exchange of success stories, best practices, and shared data systems. It supports the use of consistent KPIs, strengthens stakeholder engagement, streamlines reporting, and equips participants to assess impact, align efforts and scale solutions.
- By optimizing resources, funding needs, and policy priorities, while aligning program goals, the coalition drives more equitable, efficient and accountable digital inclusion across Washington.

Supporting reentry through internet access, devices, and digital Skills

The Legislature should provide funding for essential digital literacy training during incarceration and funding for devices with prepaid internet access once individuals return to the community (L). Upon release, formerly incarcerated individuals have an immediate need to access online services. These include housing applications, health care and nutrition programs, resume building, job searches, virtual interviews, remote work, continued education and managing daily life in a digital world.

People reentering society after long periods of incarceration often face a significant digital disadvantage. Upon release, most formerly incarcerated individuals have an immediate need to access online services for basic necessities, including housing, health care and food and nutrition services. Limited exposure to evolving technologies, combined with gaps in reentry support, leaves many without the tools or connectivity needed to navigate modern life – whether for employment, education, or accessing essential services.

This recommendation will deliver the following benefits:

- Offer individuals, upon release from incarceration, low-cost computing device or tablets and/or a smartphone with a six-month prepaid hotspot to ensure reliable and immediate access to the internet. If funding were provided, these devices could be made available through facilities or community-based organizations that offer digital literacy training.
- Complete resumes, searching for and applying for jobs, participating in job interviews and working remotely.
- Continue learning without interruptions.
- Report virtually to a supervising officer versus travelling to a physical office; maintaining compliance with specific conditions or a partial confinement program like submitting a weekly schedule, and possibly participating in substance use treatment, anger management or other programs.
- Navigate bus lines and other transportation systems.
- Maintain connections with family members, other loved ones and support structures.
- Manage everyday life in a digital world.

Using one standard to make digital equity programs fair and easier to access

The WSBO should be directed to adopt the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a digital equity key performance indicator for the affordability threshold. This standard is already used by several state agencies (A). Structural barriers arise when state agencies apply differing poverty measures – such as varying income thresholds or eligibility criteria – leading to fragmented service delivery, misaligned resource allocation and inequitable access to digital equity programs across regions.

This recommendation will deliver the following benefits:

Streamlined eligibility and service coordination

- Consistent poverty measures enable agencies to align program eligibility, reducing administrative burden and ensuring residents receive timely, coordinated support.

Equitable resource allocation

- Unified metrics support data-driven funding decisions, ensuring resources are distributed fairly across communities where needs are greatest.

Making grant funding fair: Prioritizing equity and community impact

The WSBO should establish a transparent, monitored and equitable grant funding model that prioritizes proposals that reduce the equity gaps experienced by covered populations (A). The grant program should establish a pre-qualified multi-vendor list of nonprofit community-based organizations for specific opportunities (A).

Unmonitored and unaligned funding distribution erodes community trust, weakens accountability and fragments implementation. The recommendation addresses unmonitored and unaligned grant funding allocation through a transparent funding model. An outcome-driven grantmaking model that leverages a pre-qualified vendor roster of community-based organizations, establishing an oversight team with dynamic allocation authority of resources based on each entity's achievement of outcomes, KPI reporting, return on investment (ROI) targets and overall monitoring.

This recommendation will deliver the following benefits:

Increased community trust and accountability

- Create a transparent and equitable grant funding model that ensures funds are allocated based on performance and population need, addressing concerns raised in the Office of the Washington State Auditor's Accountability Audit Report.²³ A publicly accessible allocation processes rebuild trust among communities, particularly in underserved areas.

Outcome-driven grantmaking

- Community-based organizations receive funding from a shared pool proportionate to their service area, covered population, performance and alignment with statewide equity goals.

Scalable trust network

- A roster expands the pool of trusted partners while maintaining rigorous oversight, allowing for agile deployment of funds (during the grant period) to high-performing organizations.

Recommendations by the Broadband Accessibility and Services Workgroup

Bringing digital equity resources together for all communities

Build state and local capacity to convene underserved populations. Centralize a directory or inventory of digital access and accessibility support programs, tools and resources (L).

Digital navigation and digital skills training are often grassroots and uncoordinated. There is no standard for such programs, and they may exist in various settings. The ad hoc nature leads to a lack of reliable training resources, subject matter expertise and access to local solutions. Washington can provide a coordinated hub that gathers resources in one place for all communities, including digital navigators and training programs. The disability community experiences additional gaps due to the lack of digital accessibility expertise, a niche skillset that is not widely available across Washington. Creating a repository of these resources is critical to ensure digital accessibility for all.

Partnering locally to build broadband action teams that reflect community needs

Tailor solutions to the area being served by partnering with local decision-makers to develop broadband action teams or other models of engagement across regions (A).

There are various efforts to build digital equity across various partnerships in Washington. Washington could serve as a resource to support local and regional efforts building teams that include under-resourced communities. By providing information and resources on effective models that engage under-resourced groups, Washington can support local and regional efforts and build local capacity.

Making sure every household has the right device and support to get online

Increase in-home access to devices that allow individuals to access community, education, jobs, health care and reduce affordability barriers. Increase person-centered support for digital literacy (L).

Programs that provide low- to no-cost devices are sporadic. When programs do exist, the devices provided to individuals may be inadequate to serve their needs. For example, devices may have limited capacity to run

²³ Office of the Washington State Auditor, "[Accountability Audit Report: Washington State Department of Commerce for the Period of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024](#),"

accessibility software, which can render the device unusable for a person with a disability. The device may have slow processing speeds, which impact the person's ability to work from home or participate in telehealth services. More consistent, tailored approaches are needed to ensure that every household can effectively and consistently access broadband. Digital skills training needs to be tailored to the needs of the household and individuals using the services.

Making digital skills programs work for people with disabilities

Integrate digital accessibility training, resources and services into digital literacy and navigation programs to meet the disability community's needs, including state workers (L).

Disability accessibility skill training and resources are siloed and often unavailable. People with disabilities who need help with adaptive equipment, software or other issues related to access to digital tools and devices are unable to get help from traditional digital skills programs because such programs do not include accessibility content. Additionally, digital content is often not fully accessible to people with disabilities, which renders programs and services unavailable to them. For example, a scheduling portal for virtual mental health services doesn't work with a screen reader, making that service unavailable for blind people. Providing ADA compliance and access training to all digital navigators strengthens access to jobs, health care and strengthens community for everyone.

Supporting Tribal and rural communities to lead their own digital equity solutions

Prioritize and coordinate local capacity-building resources for community-led decisions that support human and physical infrastructure with local decision-makers, tribal nations, community organizations and intergovernmental partners (L).

Lack of digital infrastructure persists despite investments to expand broadband accessibility. Communities note that grants are often awarded to larger entities that are not familiar with the issues faced in tribal and rural communities. Since the solutions are being funded outside of the community, the intervention fails to help communities build capacity to maintain services and expand after grant funding is gone. For the local capacity building to be effective, it must include partnerships with tribal nations, community-based organizations, intergovernmental resources and local decision-makers.

Recommendations by the Data and Measurement Workgroup

Using existing data to track progress and improve digital equity

Use the data systems Washington already has to track how people are using digital tools and services. Track adoption, use, and outcomes across race, income, geography, age, disability and language to understand and respond to access needs (L).

Utilizing existing systems will ensure efficient use of resources and provide a robust foundation for identifying gaps and measuring progress as outlined in Washington's Digital Equity Plan.²⁴ Clear, detailed data helps agencies focus their efforts, track how funding changes affect vulnerable communities, and stay accountable by using methods that others can repeat and verify—all within current government funding systems.

Pathways to implementation include:

- Identify key metrics and data points to be tracked.
- Utilize existing data platforms for integration and reporting.

²⁴ Washington State Broadband Office, "[Digital Equity Plan](#),"

- Engage community leaders on data collection and monitoring processes.
- Regularly review and update the system to ensure accuracy and relevance.

Tracking what works: Building a shared KPI repository for digital equity

A central repository of KPIs will reduce duplication, promote shared learning and provide an evidence base to evaluate program performance and prioritize resource allocation (L).

Pathways to implementation include:

- Inventory existing KPIs across state, local, tribal and federal programs (e.g., education, broadband access, digital literacy).
- Classify KPIs by relevance to state and federal digital equity goals and local needs.
- Develop and update KPI inventory with BEAD-covered communities.

Tracking what matters: Measuring the real impact of digital equity programs

Develop a comprehensive framework for measuring the impact and outcomes of digital equity initiatives. Include both financial and non-financial implications of digital equity initiatives across state-funded programs and grant recipients (L).

Tracking outcomes will help assess the effectiveness of initiatives and make necessary adjustments for improvement. Capturing diverse outcomes, such as access to services, improved well-being and cost-effectiveness, will build the case for sustained investment and reveal consequences of underfunding.

Pathways to implementation include:

- Define key impact domains (e.g., education, workforce, health, civic participation) and associated indicators.
- Require impact reporting in funding agreements for both stable and unstable funding initiatives.
- Require the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from participants and providers and implement recursive KPIs.

Connecting the dots: Promoting interagency data sharing to advance digital inclusion

Promote the use of existing shared data systems to improve coordination and access to digital equity-related data across agencies and sectors (L).

Leveraging existing infrastructure reduces duplication, supports data interoperability and enhances the ability to assess statewide digital inclusion progress using consistent, connected information.

Pathways to implementation include:

- Update key impact domains annually (e.g., K-12 education, broadband availability, digital literacy in workforce development) where integrated data would clarify digital equity challenges and progress in Washington.
- Facilitate interagency agreements and data sharing protocols to improve access and integration.
- Encourage the use of common identifiers or frameworks to align digital equity data across programs.

Recommendations by the Public-Private Partnership Workgroup

Expanding device access through community-based donation and refurbishment programs

To make affordable devices more accessible, Washington should support both in-kind and financial donations (L). Regional hubs – such as libraries, schools and other trusted community-based organizations – are established to distribute donated devices to people in their communities. The hubs already have strong relationships with their communities and can help ensure devices reach the people who need them most.

Device standards should include:

- Minimum performance requirements
- Up-to-date software
- Accessibility compliance
- Standards that meet accessibility standards and end-of-life requirements, would be developed for each type of device, such as PC, Mac, computing device, tablet and specialized assistive technologies

These donations can be in any condition, whether they are working or not, including older systems. These devices would be rebuilt or retrofitted for community-based organizations and programs to access at no cost or at a very low cost.

Washington grant funding should be provided for nonprofit and community-based organizations or programs to build and increase infrastructure for the receipt of device donations. Corporate donors should be incentivized to contribute devices, as outlined in the next recommendation.

This recommendation builds on the work already being done by local groups like NCW Tech Alliance and national organizations like Digitunity to increase device ownership and digital access for everyone.²⁵²⁶

Making corporate donations reliable: Incentives and accountability for long-term commitments

Corporate donations and grants can end without warning, which puts digital equity programs at risk. To encourage long-term support, **Washington should create an accountability framework for for-profit partners (A).**

State agencies that offer grants – such as the Department of Social and Health Services and the Employment Security Department – should commit to at least two years of funding. This stability will encourage corporate and private partners to make three- to seven-year commitments to donate devices, infrastructure and internet services.

To increase donations from private entities, private partners earn credit toward future state-funded projects. For example, a \$1,000 donation of equipment or services could equal five points on a grant application. Other incentives could include tax benefits or similar rewards. To protect communities, penalties should be applied to corporations that end programs without proper transition planning.

²⁵ NCW Tech Alliance, (2025), <https://www.ncwtech.org/techhelp>

²⁶ Digitunity, (2025), <https://digitunity.org/>

Partnering with trusted local organizations to deliver real digital equity solutions

Work with trusted local organizations to match the right solutions to the right challenges. Libraries can serve as key entry points into communities, along with community-based organizations (L, A).

To engage communities in meaningful ways:

- Work with local planning areas across Washington to build databases of community-based organizations, private programs and public services at the state, county and city levels – all focused on digital equity.
- Make this a living document with clear goals and expectations.
- Consider working with the Economic Justice Alliance as a resource for building and maintaining these databases.
- Require documentation of actual community impact – not just promised outcomes.
- Use available capacity and resources to build infrastructure that supports and uplifts community-driven recommendations.²⁷

Creating a unified framework for digital navigation, literacy, and credential recognition

Revisit [HB 2155 \(2023-2024\)](#): Washington Credential Registry (L).²⁸

Credential registries play a key role in advancing digital equity and access to technology. The Legislature should reintroduce House Bill 2155 (2023-24) to create a statewide standard for digital navigation and digital literacy.

Standardization should include:

- Instructional models like train-the-trainer programs
- Digital assistive technology and accessibility features
- Culturally responsive teaching and assessment methods
- Materials available in multiple languages
- Documentation of learning, evaluation of skills and alignment with workforce needs

Credential registries connect access to technology, learning and broadband. To be effective, they need a common language and data standards for tracking degree completion and educational outcomes. This is essential for assessing industry needs and workforce development, as it enables these services to be housed within local colleges at no cost to eligible community members. This initiative should include stackable learning pathways, post-secondary learning and connections between learners and employers.

Washington State University Global Campus recommends designing a cohesive curriculum that involves “collaborating with experts in digital literacy from various stakeholder sectors to create both online and face-to-face training and education programs.”²⁹

In addition to institutions of higher education, other organizations, such as technical schools and nonprofits, should be eligible for listing on the credential registry.

²⁷ Washington Economic Justice Alliance, (2025), <https://waeconomicjusticealliance.com/>

²⁸ Washington State Legislature, “[Bill Summary: HB 2155](#),” (2023),

²⁹ Washington State University Global Campus, “[Building Foundations for Statewide Digital Literacy](#),”

Bringing businesses to the table: A DEF subcommittee for inclusive, accountable collaboration

Form a subcommittee within the DEF to help build a strong Public-Private Partnership. This group would give corporations a direct point of contact to collaborate on programs and explore funding opportunities (D).

As part of the proposal review process, the subcommittee should include current DEF members and community partners.

The subcommittee's goals would be to:

- Increase private sector involvement in DEF
- Include corporate representatives in the subcommittee
- Review applications and confirm that all proposed partnerships and program details are accurate³⁰³¹

This process would apply to digital equity funding, including programs for digital literacy, digital navigation and related services.

Conclusion: Embedding digital equity into everyday government

Washington agencies serve millions of residents through programs that support income security, health care, education, transportation and social services. By working together and partnering with community organizations, we can make digital equity part of how these services are delivered – making them more effective and more fair. Ongoing coordination between agencies and smart, data-driven decisions are key to meeting the changing digital needs of Washington residents and ensuring everyone can access the services they deserve.

With federal funding uncertainty and the digital divide growing, Washington cannot afford to wait. By swiftly adopting DEF's recommendations – updating policies, passing laws, improving agency collaboration and supporting DEF's work – we can integrate digital equity into the governance structure. That means giving every Washington resident the tools to succeed online and building a stronger, more inclusive future.

Now is the time to act. These recommendations offer a clear path to strengthen communities through digital inclusion. By advancing equitable access to technology, we can support economic mobility, improve public services and ensure every Washington resident has the tools to thrive in a connected world.

³⁰ Washington State Legislature, "[RCW § 43.330.5393: Digital equity planning grant program](#),"

³¹ Washington State Legislature, "[RCW § 43.330.412: Digital equity opportunity program—Administration—Grant program](#),"

Glossary

Agency Request Legislation (ARL): A process through which state agencies can propose legislation to the Legislature.

Covered Populations: Describes the eight population groups the National Telecommunications and Information Administration identified as underrepresented communities: low-income households; aging individuals; incarcerated individuals; veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who have limited English proficiency or have low levels of literacy; individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. The Washington Digital Equity Plan also includes two population groups – children and youth in foster care, and individuals experiencing housing instability – identified in Washington law’s definition of “covered populations.”

Digital Equity Act (DEA): A federal law enacted under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to fund digital equity planning and implementation – recently declared “unconstitutional” by the current federal administration.

Decision packages (DPs): A key set of building blocks to construct the budget request. The decision package is the place for the agency to make a compelling and persuasive argument for any proposed changes. Policymakers will rely upon this information when evaluating the request.

Digital Equity Integration and Coordination Act: A proposed Washington State legislative framework that would require agencies to embed digital equity into core service delivery, coordinate across sectors, and report on progress.

Digital Equity: The condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in society, democracy and the economy.

Digital Inclusion: Activities necessary to ensure digital equity, including affordable broadband, devices, digital literacy training, technical support and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency.

Digital Navigator: A trusted guide who assists individuals in accessing devices, connectivity and digital skills training. Often employed by community-based organizations.

Determinants of Equity (Statewide Impact Area): Driving factors that impact the overall quality of life for all Washingtonians. Executive Order 22-04, enacted by the Legislature and Governor’s Office, defines 15 social conditions that everyone in Washington needs to flourish and achieve their full potential. Digital equity is recognized as the 15th determinant of equity.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): Measurable values that demonstrate the effective achievement of key strategies and business objectives. WSBO will utilize KPIs to measure progress towards improving digital equity among the covered populations and to identify if there are any gaps that may need to be addressed to “course correct” or supplement existing activities.

Pre-Qualified Vendor Roster: A vetted list of community-based organizations authorized to deliver digital inclusion services. Streamlines procurement and ensures equity-driven service delivery.

Universal Service Fund: A state-managed fund in RCW 80.36.650, which is designed to support universal access to communications services.

Appendix A: DEF Membership List

Member	Organization
Amanda Six	Libraries of Stevens County
Amanda Hoefer	Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Bill Kehoe	WaTech
Bre Urness-Straight	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Carolyn Cole	Department of Social and Health Services
Connie Behe	Pierce County Library System
Darryl Hunt	King County Department of Information Technology
Elizabeth Gordon	Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
Eu-wanda Eagans	Goodwill of the Olympics and Rainier region
Griff Masters	Triceratops-Tech
Jess Clayton	Disability Inclusion Network
Laura Ruderman	Technology Alliance
Leslie Hardwick	NoaNet
Senator Lisa Wellman	Washington State Senate
Markalene Madera	Spokane Tribe of Indians
Representative Mia Gregerson	Washington State House of Representatives
Mike Steenhout	Washington State Department of Corrections
Sharonne Navas	Equity in Education Coalition
Representative Stephanie Barnard	Washington State House of Representatives
Teresa Barry	Safe Haven Community Center
Tiffany Circle	Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

Member	Organization
Trevor Lane	Washington State University Extension
Vanessa Gutierrez	Sno-Isle Libraries
Will Booth	Creating Pathways
Will Durden	Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Appendix B: Policy funding ideas

Below are six policy concepts that form a robust framework for long-term funding to expand digital opportunities across Washington. Each idea supports sustainable revenue generation and strengthens digital inclusion initiatives. Further research and stakeholder engagement are recommended for each.

Digital opportunity bond program

- **Policy Concept:** Issue state-level bonds to fund broadband access, digital skills training and community digital resources.
- **Revenue Mechanism:** Bonds backed by state credit and repaid through existing, increased or new tax revenues, as well as efficiency savings over time. Revenue deposited into the Digital Equity Opportunity Fund.
- **Key Impact:** Provides long-term, predictable funding while driving improvements in digital services
- **Open Question:** What specific tax revenue sources or efficiency savings can be identified to repay bond debt?

Telecommunications license fee allocation

- **Policy Concept:** Institute a small surcharge on telecommunications license fees.
- **Revenue Mechanism:** Redirect existing fee revenues without increasing taxpayer burden. Revenue deposited into the Digital Equity Opportunity Fund.
- **Key Impact:** Creates a reliable funding source that underwrites programs like subsidized broadband and digital skills training.
- **Question:** Further research required.

Incentivize public-private partnerships

- **Policy Concept:** Foster partnerships with private companies and foundations to invest in broadband access in underserved areas. Incentives tied to benchmarks in Washington's Digital Equity Plan benchmarks and/or KPIs.
- **Revenue Mechanism:** Leverages private capital alongside public funds, offering tax or revenue-sharing benefits to reduce state financial risk. Revenue to be deposited into the Digital Equity Opportunity Fund.
- **Key Impact:** Accelerates network expansion and drives innovation through shared investment.
- **Question:** What resources within Commerce will lead and manage public-private partnerships?

Integration of digital inclusion into state benefits and workforce programs

- **Policy Concept:** Amend existing government programs like SNAP, Medicaid, workforce development to include subsidized internet access, device vouchers and digital skills training as eligible services.
- **Revenue Mechanism:** Explore net-neutral spending options, increased appropriations or funding through bond programs, license fees, public-private partnerships or updates to the State Universal Communication Program (SUCP) fund.
- **Key Impact:** Enhances citizen capacity and productivity while generating efficiency savings.
- **Question:** Are the state general fund or public-private partnerships viable funding sources?

State Universal Communication Program Fund for digital opportunity

- **Policy Concept:** Expand or create a dedicated fund (potentially by updating the current Universal Service Fund) to support discounted internet access and community tech centers.
- **Revenue Mechanism:** Sustained by mandatory contributions or fees from telecom providers.
- **Key Impact:** Ensures a steady revenue stream aligned with digital innovation and market growth.
- **Comment:** A greater level of research is needed to propose updates to the State Universal Communication Program. Is advocating for SUCP extension a viable starting point?

Digital opportunity tax credits and incentives for innovation

- **Policy Concept:** Establish tax credits for companies investing in digital infrastructure, public Wi-Fi, digital navigation and skills training.
- **Revenue Mechanism:** While not direct revenue, these incentives stimulate private investment and economic growth, broadening the tax base.
- **Key Impact:** Spurs job creation, innovation and long-term sustainable growth.
- **Question:** Further research required