Investing in Digital Inclusion: New Strategies for Closing the Digital Divide
Which best describes you:

1) I’m a digital inclusion practitioner; it’s core to what I do.
2) I’m a frequent partner of digital inclusion organizations.
3) I’m somewhat familiar with the topic.
4) I’m new to the field.
DIGITAL DIVIDE

This is the problem to be solved. It’s the gap between those who do and do not have high speed home internet that’s reliable and affordable, along with the skills and tools to effectively utilize it.
DIGITAL INCLUSION

These are the actions and efforts to bridge the digital divide.
DIGITAL EQUITY

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Insights on the disconnected

Francellla Ochillo
Executive Director
New(er) Funding Sources
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Key broadband provisions in infrastructure bill

- **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program**: This program offers grants to each state for the purpose of expanding broadband deployment in rural and underserved areas.
- **Affordable Connectivity Fund**: The “Emergency Broadband Benefit Program” was renamed the “Affordable Connectivity Program” and requires all internet service plans to be eligible. Households that meet eligibility requirements can receive up to $30 per month for broadband.
- **Digital Equity Act of 2021**: States can submit applications to receive grants for broadband activities by developing “digital equity plans.”
- **Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program**: A program created in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, which aims to make broadband more accessible to indigenous communities, gets extended in the infrastructure bill.
- **Middle Mile Grant Program**: This grant program aims to reduce costs and connectivity barriers associated with providing broadband access to underserved or unserved areas (defined as those without broadband speeds of 100/20 Mbps).

- **$42.45B**: Amount allocated
- **$16.20B**: Amount allocated
- **$2.75B**: Amount allocated
- **$2.00B**: Amount allocated
- **$1.00B**: Amount allocated

As of Aug. 4, 2021.
Credit: Aileigh Andoe
Source: U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Affordable Connectivity Program Benefits

- Up to $30/month towards broadband service from participating providers
- Up to $75/month towards broadband service for households on tribal lands, including Hawaiian Home Lands
- A one-time discount of up to $100 to purchase a laptop, desktop, computer, or tablet
Figure 2

**NTIA Expects BEAD Implementation to Take Roughly 4 Years**

Estimated timeline for proposal development and funding allocations

**ESTIMATED TIMELINE**

Timeline approximate unless exact date specified

- **2022**
  - Notice of Funding Opportunity released May 13
  - Letter of intent

- **2023**
  - Due July 18
  - 5-year plan
  - Initial proposal

- **2024**
  - Due 180 days after new DATA maps and notice fundings amounts issued
  - Final proposal
  - Due 365 days after initial proposal approval

- **2026+**
  - 4-year implementation

(C) Pew Charitable Trusts
Digital Equity Act

- **STATE PLANNING GRANT PROGRAM**
  - $60 MILLION

- **STATE CAPACITY GRANT PROGRAM**
  - $1.44 BILLION

- **COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM**
  - $1.25 BILLION

Source: DigitalInclusion.Org
“Covered Populations”

1. Households under 150% poverty threshold;
2. Aging individuals
3. Incarcerated individuals, other than in a Federal correctional facility
4. Veterans
5. Individuals with disabilities
6. Individuals with a language barrier (are English learners or with low levels of literacy)
7. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
8. Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

IDENTIFY
Acknowledge sovereign status. Research demographics, Tribal programs/orgs, etc. Understand and respect the political culture of tribes, their leadership, and how they are organized. Is there a 101 session that tribes provide?

PLAN - TRIBAL PRIORITY/NEEDS
Understand the long-term vision for connectivity for the tribe. Find out current plans or projects that are in place. Involve Tribal programs, organizations, and businesses that address critical needs of the tribe.

LAUNCH
Disclose data collection practices and how the information is being used for research and gained knowledge. Discuss ownership and protection of the data. Insure outreach includes appropriate language, local information hubs, in-person resources, etc.

REFLECTION
Insure your efforts are moving towards sustainability and contributing to the overall development of the tribe.

CAPACITY OF THE TRIBE
Communicate and Inform regularly. Insure your efforts are moving towards sustainability of the project. Move beyond performative and move towards being transformative.

SHARE FINDINGS
Give credit to the community and Tribe for continued efforts and successes in the region. Acknowledge your Tribal partners and uplift the work they are doing in their community. Offer next steps and revisit goals and insure they are reciprocal and mutually beneficial.
Digital navigators are trusted guides who address the whole digital inclusion process — home connectivity, devices, and digital skills — with community members through repeated interactions.

Find resources: digitalinclusion.org/dn
Digital Navigator Process

1. Assess Needs
2. Evaluate & Discuss Needs
3. Refer to Relevant Resources
4. Check In & Evaluate Progress

Support Services:
- Digital Skills Training
- Appropriate Devices
- Affordable Broadband
Example:
Abe, digital navigator at Hoopa Valley Tribe, advocating for each person:

“As a Digital Navigator working for an ISP, I am in a unique situation. Learning to navigate the portals we access to enroll subscribers was the biggest challenge as this was new to all of us. I learn something new as I am challenged daily, but I would not have it any other way. The sincere thanks that I get from just one person when I tell them they are qualified for ACP and they will have their internet bill paid ... makes the challenges we went through to get to where we are now worth every gray hair I got along the way.”
Do you know your neighbors?

Have you:

- Met your state broadband/DE office?
- Attended one of their community engagement events?
Connecting the dots

Colin Rhinesmith
Founder and Director