

Ensure State Digital Equity Plans Include Libraries

The federal government is making historic investments in advancing digital equity, literacy, and inclusion for all through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The first step is state planning – including a public comment period—before moving toward plan implementation. **If libraries are not in the state plans, they are unlikely to receive funding** to help ensure all residents have access to broadband, technology, and skills for full participation in the digital economy. Altogether [states received](#) about \$60 million for digital equity planning with an additional \$1.44 BILLION allocated for implementation of the plans over the next five years.

Each state is required to post its plan for public comment for at least 30 days and respond to comments. Get up to speed on key federal funding programs [HERE](#); check to see if your state’s plan is available for comment [HERE](#); and read on for information on how to make your voice heard.

Act now

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a digitally equitable future for all. Libraries have the existing physical space, technological infrastructure, staff expertise, resources, and community reputation to advance each state’s digital equity goals. Libraries need to speak up and seize the moment so they are included, supported, and funded through their state’s digital equity plan. **Read the plan, advocate, and highlight the work of libraries in your state.**

When plans are submitted to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for approval before the end of the year (2023), states must include how community feedback was addressed. Once approved, states will receive funds from NTIA to implement their plans.

Background on what states MUST include in their plans can be found [HERE](#) on page 2. At a minimum, ALA recommends all libraries use your software’s Find feature to **search for “library” or “libraries” in the document** to see when and how libraries are mentioned. Review the references for anything that can be amplified or clarified and consider any obvious gaps that could be addressed through existing or potential library services. Your comments may be brief and should be submitted in whatever form the state offers (such as an online form, by email, through a public listening session, or other).

For example, Louisiana was the first plan made available for comment. It includes 32 library references, including listing the Louisiana Library Network and the State Library of Louisiana as existing statewide partners; describing the role libraries play in broadband adoption, access, digital skills, devices, affordability, and workforce upskilling for students; and direct mention and designation of the State Library as manager for the statewide digital navigator program in public libraries in the implementation plan priorities.

In addition to the overall search, wherever possible we also recommend:

- Reviewing the **asset inventory**, which includes:
 - An inventory of current resources, programs, and strategies that promote digital equity for covered populations.
Question: Are there key library assets that are missing and should be included?

- A needs assessment that identifies the current baseline and barriers to digital equity, especially those affecting covered populations.
Question: Does the assessment accurately reflect the barriers you see in your community?
- Reviewing the **Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement** section.
Question: Are libraries listed as collaborators and/or stakeholders? Are libraries' roles accurately reflected? What role could your library play if you had additional resources?
- Reviewing the **Implementation Plan**.
Question: Are your programs and services included in the plan? What services could be expanded, and what programs could be developed to support covered populations if your library had additional resources?
- **Encouraging community partners to also comment.** Ask them to highlight work you are doing together (or could be doing with more support) to advance digital opportunity.

As you draft your response, **be specific and connect the dots**. Don't assume state broadband planners know all the ways libraries support the state's digital equity goals. If your library:

- provides Wi-Fi hotspots, community internet, and/or Wi-Fi enabled bookmobiles, then you are providing broadband access.
- offers one-on-one computer coaching, teaches digital literacy or information literacy skills, or provides classes on emerging technologies, then you are building digital skills.
- provides access to laptops, computers, maker labs, or digital media labs, then you enable technology access.
- provides community-relevant resources, needed technology, and community partnerships to support jobseekers, aspiring and existing entrepreneurs and small business owners; and/or trains student workers and provides residencies or fellowships that build digital literacy for covered populations, then your library supports workforce development.
- partners with health providers and other community partners to leverage library space, Wi-Fi, computers, and training to ensure residents can access health services, then you are supporting telehealth.

These are just some of the ways libraries support digital equity. Libraries have a proven track record of success and should be recognized so we can continue and expand this work. When possible, **provide data and examples** that highlight the impact of your programs and services, particularly as it relates to supporting [covered populations](#). Lastly—**submit your comments by the deadline!** (Even if the deadline for your state has passed, it's still useful to review the plan and consider reaching out to the appropriate state agency with suggestions and ideas.) Learn more [here](#).