

# What Your Library Needs to Know: Seeking State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Funding

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The Digital Equity Act (DEA) allocates \$2.75 billion over three grant programs to promote digital inclusion and ensure that all communities can access and use affordable, reliable, high-speed internet to meet their needs and improve their lives.

The first program supporting development of state digital equity plans is now complete. As of April 2, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has approved 32 state digital equity plans and recently released the [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) (NOFO) for the second grant program: State Capacity Grants.

In the coming year, states will begin implementing their digital equity plans through state capacity grants. The implementation process for each state will be on different timelines and with [different funding amounts](#) based on a formula established by the NTIA. For instance, Maine was the [first state](#) in the nation to have its plan approved. Grants will fund programs to achieve and sustain the state's digital equity goals. Libraries are well positioned to assist states in achieving their goals and receive funding to support and expand their digital equity work. Learn more about the requirements for the state capacity grants, including who is eligible for subgrants (including libraries!), who is included among the covered populations, and how funds may be used in the NOFO. The Benton Foundation also provides a summary [here](#).

## How to Prepare for the State's Capacity Grants

States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have until May 28, 2024, to apply for their Capacity Grant funding. Once funds are awarded by NTIA, states will announce funding opportunities to implement their digital equity plans at the local level.

Each state will determine its own process for releasing funding and likely will have varying deadlines to apply. There are steps your library can start taking now, however, to get ready to apply when your state's funding opportunities are announced later in the year.

**Step 1: Read Your [State's Digital Equity Plan](#) So You Can Align Your Program with Your State's Plan.** If your state's plan is not listed [visit your state broadband office website](#) for updates. Each plan includes:

- The state's vision for digital equity goals and strategies.
- Key performance indicators (KPIs) that will be used to measure progress.
- A list of unique assets, plans, and programs that promote digital equity for each [covered population](#).
- A needs assessment.

- The strategy and key activities that will inform the implementation process.

The project proposal(s) you design should reflect the goals and gaps of the State’s plan; however, you may notice a local community need that was not identified. You are embedded and connected to your local community in a way that a state entity likely is not. Talk with [your state broadband office](#) if you have questions about the plan.

**NOTE:** NTIA allows grantees to use up to 20% of their grant amount to update and maintain their state plans. If you see a gap in the plan the library and partners could address to improve digital equity for covered populations in your state, you can make the case for an update to the state’s plan.

### **Step 2: Explore the Digital Equity Ecosystem in Your Community.**

Reading your state’s digital equity plan is a great way to learn more about the state’s goals and identify barriers, assets, and potential partners. However, dig deeper and learn more about the community you serve, especially if you are thinking of a proposal to support [covered populations](#) at the local level. Asset mapping helps community organizations like libraries identify resources, barriers, and gaps in service, build partnerships, and plan for future work.

Check to see if an asset map has been conducted locally at the city, county, or regional level. If you can’t find an asset inventory, consider conducting one. Check out these resources to help you get started:

- [Asset Mapping: Data Equity Gathering Best Practices](#) from the NTIA
- [Asset Mapping for Digital Inclusion](#) from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA)

### **Step 3: Identify Your Role**

After reviewing the state’s plan and exploring your local digital equity ecosystem, identify where your library can make the most impact in advancing the state’s implementation plan. What are your library’s strengths? What are your digital equity goals? What expertise and experience do you bring that will advance digital equity in your community? What services do you currently offer that could be expanded, and what programs could be developed to support one or more covered populations? Reflect on these questions as you begin to identify which program idea(s) you want to explore further.

### **Step 4: Identify Collaborators and Stakeholders**

You should not do this work alone. The state’s plan was created through strategic collaborations and stakeholder engagement, and your proposal should too! Include partnerships that strengthen project goals and connections within your community.

- What partnerships do you already have that could be leveraged?

- Are there organizations you have not partnered with yet?
- Which groups in your community support digital equity work but may not categorize themselves as digital equity organizations, such as churches, food pantries, parks, etc.?
- Which collaborators and stakeholders can provide community connections, resources, expertise, etc., that you do not have to improve the program's effectiveness and reach?

Reach out to these potential stakeholders and explore potential partnerships. Here are some resources to help you get started.

- [Digital Inclusion Coalition Guidebook](#) from NDIA
- [Digital Equity Community Outreach and Engagement](#) from NTIA

### **Step 5: Start Planning with Collaborators and Stakeholders**

Start building your program proposal with your collaborators and stakeholders.

1. Identify the project scope.
2. Decide and document what role each partner and stakeholder will play.
  - a. Who has the programmatic expertise?
  - b. Who can do the evaluation?
  - c. Who has the space and technology?
  - d. Who can manage and administer the program?
  - e. Is a memorandum of understanding or other type of agreement needed to formalize the partner relationship?
  - f. What other assets do partners bring that will strengthen the program, support the digital equity plan strategy in the short term, and set it up for long-term success?
3. Identify measurable goals.
  - a. What are your program goals?
  - b. How will you measure progress toward achieving these goals, both short-term and long-term?
  - c. What data will you need to collect, how will it be collected, and where will it be stored?
  - d. How will you gather the necessary data while still protecting patron privacy?
  - e. The digital equity plan includes the state's goals. As you develop your proposal, make sure you are thinking about how you will measure your program's outcomes in relation to the state plan.

## Step 6: Stay Informed.

1. **Check your [state's broadband office website](#)** for updates and see if they have a newsletter you can sign up for to keep up with the latest news. You may also want to reach out to the state office who created the digital capacity plan and advocate on your behalf.
2. **Watch [Building Your Digital Equity Capacity](#)** and other archived webinars from NTIA.
3. **Watch [NDIA's Senior Programs Manager Paolo Balboa's plenary session at Net Inclusion 2024](#)**, where he discusses the Digital Equity Act and the steps to take to prepare for the grant process. The [slides](#) are available. NDIA also [posted a summary of the program](#).
4. **Check out ALA's [Digital Equity Resources for Libraries web page](#)**, which includes best practices, toolkits, guides, best practices, and resources from libraries and partner organizations to support your digital equity work.

These steps will help you collaboratively design digitally equitable programs for groups within your community who have been disproportionately impacted by digital inequity. Libraries have been doing this work for decades and have the resources, expertise, experience, and community connections to leverage these funds. ALA strongly encourages libraries to connect with partners to leverage these funding opportunities. Begin planning now so you are ready to work with your local digital equity coalition to leverage state funds to build a digitally inclusive community today that is sustained in the years to come.

### Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program

In addition to the funds states will make available at the local level to support digital equity, the federal government also will announce the Digital Equity [Competitive Grant Program](#) in 2024. Libraries will be eligible to apply directly for this \$1.25 billion grant funding administered by the NTIA to support digital equity initiatives.