

Digital Equity Forum

Broadband Accessibility and Services Workgroup

Approved Recommendations/Barriers & how each recommendation addresses and/or connects to the barrier:

1. *Barrier:* *Uncoordinated resource collection and partnerships.*

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

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

2. *Barrier:* *Rural/tribal nations under resourced.*

Recommendation: *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.*

Explanation: *There are various efforts to build digital equity across different partnerships in the state. The state could act as a resource to support local and regional efforts to build teams that include under-resourced communities. By providing information and resources on effective models that engage under-resourced groups, the state can support local and regional efforts and build local capacity.*

3. *Barrier:* *Low access to devices and skills.*

Recommendation: *Increase in-home access to devices that allow individuals to access community, education, jobs, and healthcare; and reduce affordability barriers. Increase person-centered support for digital literacy.*

Explanation: Programs providing low/no cost devices are sporadic. When programs do exist, the devices provided may be inadequate for the needs of the person they are awarded to. For example: devices may have limited ability to run accessibility software, making the device unusable by the person with a disability; or may have slow processing speeds, which impacts 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 also be tailored to the needs of the household and individuals using the services.

4. Barrier: Limited digital accessibility knowledge and tools.

Recommendation: Integrate digital accessibility training and services into digital literacy and navigation programs and resources to meet the disability community needs, including state workers.

Explanation: Disability accessibility skills are siloed and often unavailable. People with disabilities who need help with adaptive equipment, software, or other issues related to access of 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, making programs and services unavailable to person with disabilities. 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, healthcare, and community for everyone.

5. Barrier: Underserved populations lack funding.

Recommendation: 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.

Explanation: Lack of digital infrastructure persists despite investments to expand broadband accessibility. Communities note that grants are often awarded to larger entities that are not conversant in 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.