



# DIGITAL EQUITY ACT - STATE PLANNING GRANT PROGRAM

PROGRAM DETAILS FOR APPLICANTS



JUNE 2022

Introduction

Overview of Digital Equity Programs

Funding formula and uses of funds

State Digital Equity Plans

Application components and process



# INTRODUCTION

# Today's webinar will focus on the Digital Equity Act, which seeks to promote digital equity and inclusion

<b>BEAD</b>	<i>Today's focus</i> <b>DIGITAL EQUITY</b>	<b>TRIBAL</b>	<b>MIDDLE MILE</b>
<b>\$42.45B</b>	<b>\$2.75B</b>	<b>\$2.00B</b>	<b>\$1.00B</b>
<b>Broadband Equity, Access &amp; Deployment Program</b>	<b>Digital Equity Act</b>	<b>Tribal Connectivity Technical Amendments</b>	<b>Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure</b>
A program to get all Americans online by funding partnerships between states or territories, communities, and stakeholders to build infrastructure where we need it and increase adoption of high-speed internet.	Three programs that provide funding to promote digital inclusion and advance equity for all. They aim to ensure that all communities can access and use affordable, reliable high-speed internet to meet their needs and improve their lives.	A program to help tribal communities expand high-speed internet access and adoption on tribal lands.	A program to expand middle mile infrastructure, to reduce the cost of connecting unserved and underserved areas.

Note: Funding amounts inclusive of all administrative set-asides

# Digital Equity Act created three programs to promote digital equity and inclusion

**Funding pool**  
**\$2.75B**

Three programs that provide funding to promote digital inclusion and advance equity for all. They aim to ensure that all communities can access and use affordable, reliable high-speed internet to meet their needs and improve their lives.

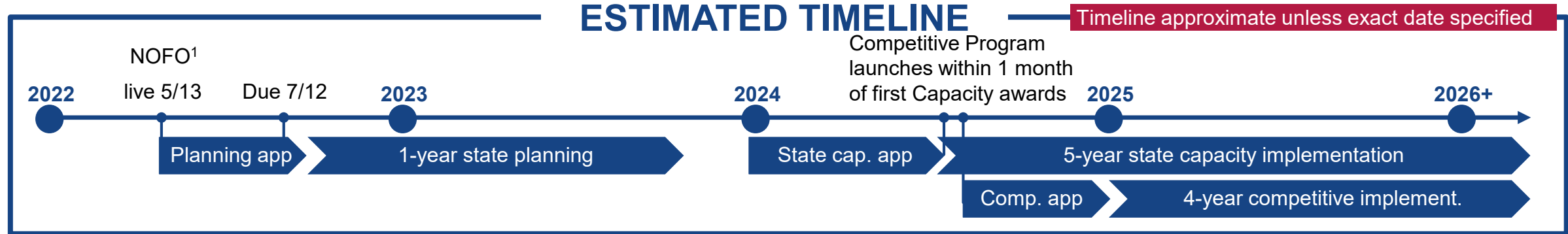
## PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTS

**The Digital Equity Act created three programs:**

<p><b>State Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$60M formula funding program to develop digital equity plans</li> </ul>	<p><b>State Capacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1.44B formula funding program to implement plans &amp; promote digital inclusion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Competitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$1.25B to implement digital equity and inclusion activities</li> </ul>
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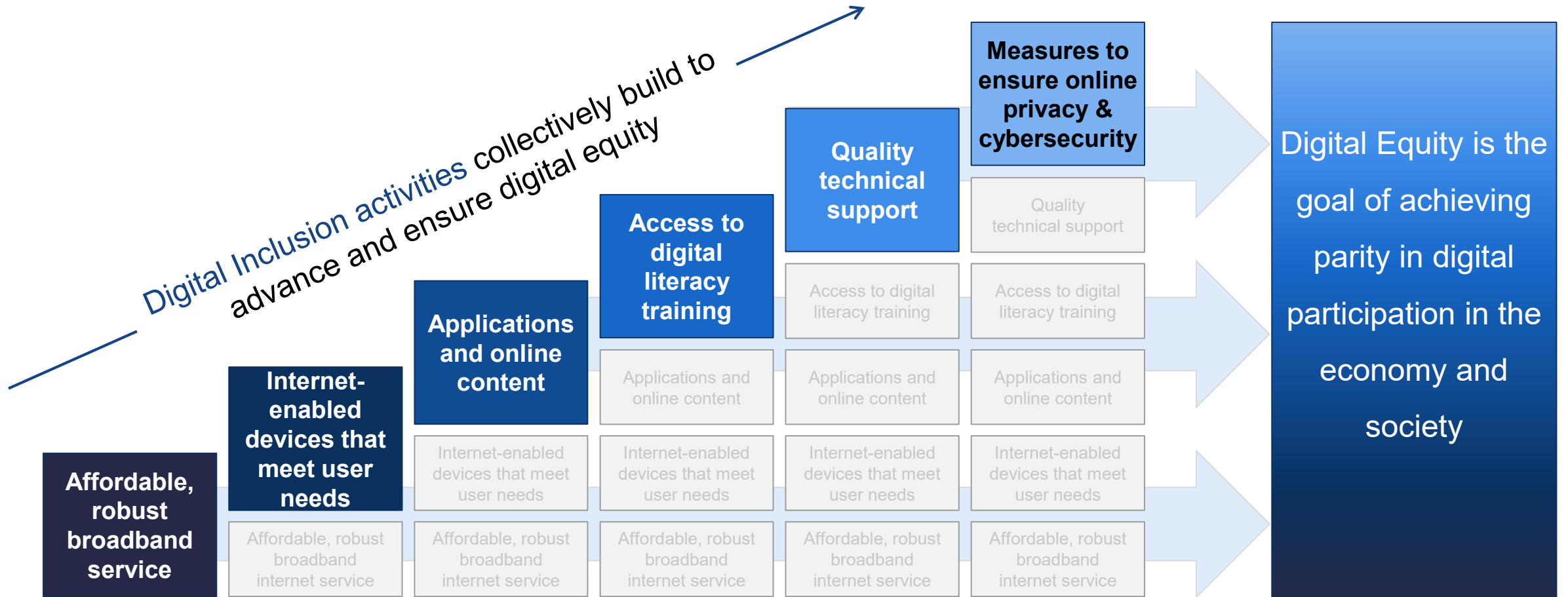
**Example eligible uses of funds across three programs include:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☆ Developing digital equity plans; states must develop a plan to be eligible for state capacity grants</li> <li>☆ Implementing digital equity plans and related activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☆ Making awards to other entities to help make digital equity plans</li> <li>☆ Providing digital literacy and digital skills education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☆ Improving accessibility and inclusivity of public resources</li> <li>☆ Facilitating the adoption of high-speed Internet</li> </ul>
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1. Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), [available here](#)

# The digital inclusion activities planned and implemented under these Programs build towards achieving digital equity



# The programs also support the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's broader goals of improving access, affordability, and adoption



## Access



Promotes the **availability of reliable, broadband technology** through stakeholder outreach and engagement



Advances the **online accessibility of public resources** and services



## Affordability



Promotes **awareness of existing programs** (e.g., Affordable Connectivity Program) that **help low-income households afford** broadband service



Offers **Internet equipment and software at low or no cost**



## Adoption and equity



**Narrows adoption disparities** across covered populations by engaging with diverse stakeholders



Implements **digital inclusion programs** that include digital skills and literacy training, technical support, and workforce development

# Though the content of this webinar focuses on applicants, NTIA<sup>1</sup> encourages all stakeholders to be engaged

Illustrative, non-exhaustive

## Telecom provider

- Provide States, other territories, and Tribal / Native entities with background data on their baseline and digital equity needs



## Community anchor institution

- Partner with States, other territories, and Tribal / Native entities to develop State Digital Equity Plans
- Advocate for community interests and needs



## Tribal government

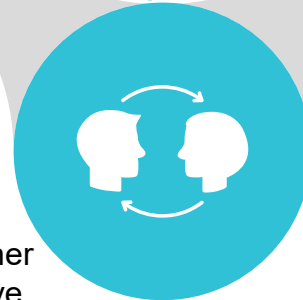
- Submit a letter of intent to participate in the Planning Grant Program
- Coordinate with relevant State(s) to develop state-wide Plans

## Local government

- Collaborate with States, other territories, and Tribal / Native to develop State Digital Equity Plans

## Community orgs

- Serve as a thought partner as States, other territories, and Tribal / Native entities design their outreach strategies
- Advocate for community interests and needs



## Individual

- Participate in the planning process of your local jurisdiction

1. National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)



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# OVERVIEW OF DIGITAL EQUITY PROGRAMS

# The Digital Equity Act focuses on addressing the needs of "covered populations" as defined by the statute

## Covered Populations

*Identity groups and communities disproportionately impacted by digital inequity*



Low-income households



People with disabilities



Aging populations



People with language barriers



Incarcerated individuals



Racial and ethnic minorities

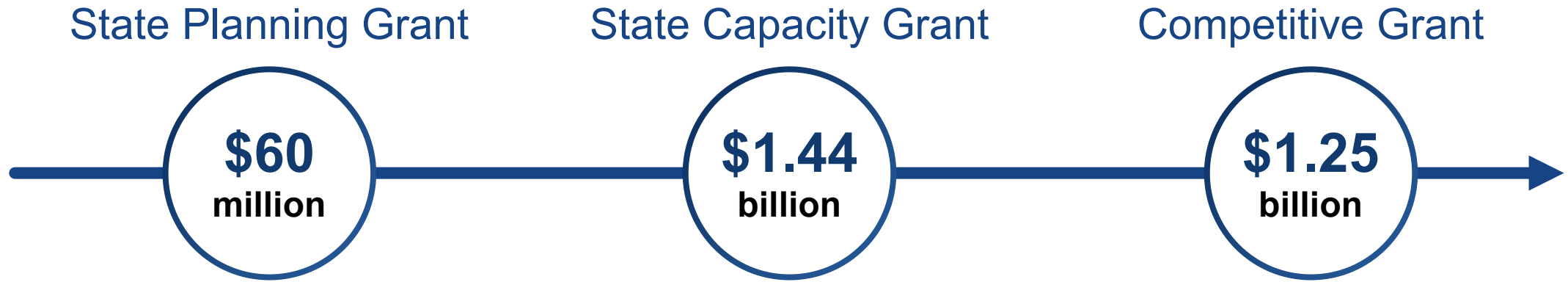


Veterans



Rural inhabitants

There are two state formula grant programs, which are separate but connected, and a third competitive grant program



	State Planning Grant	State Capacity Grant	Competitive Grant
<b>Who</b>	Open to <b>U.S. States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (States)</b>	Open to U.S. States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, that <b>completed the State Planning Program</b>	Open to <b>certain entities</b> , such as political subdivisions, Tribal entities, nonprofits, community anchor institutions, local educational agencies, and workforce development orgs
<b>What</b>	Grants will be used to <b>develop a State Digital Equity Plan</b>	Grants will be used to <b>implement State Digital Equity Plans</b>	Grants will be used to <b>develop and implement digital inclusion activities</b>

Other U.S. territories, Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian orgs have a separate statutory set-aside and separate program requirements under the State Planning and Capacity Programs, as detailed on the next page

# Other U.S. Territories and Tribal / Native entities are also eligible for funding, but must follow a different process

## Funding set asides

- \$3M in funds set aside for planning grants to U.S. territories (other than Puerto Rico) and \$15M for planning grants to Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian organizations
- Funding has been reserved proportionally for the Planning and Capacity Programs
- Award amounts for participating U.S. territories and possessions, and for Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian organizations are not subject to the funding formula applicable to the States.

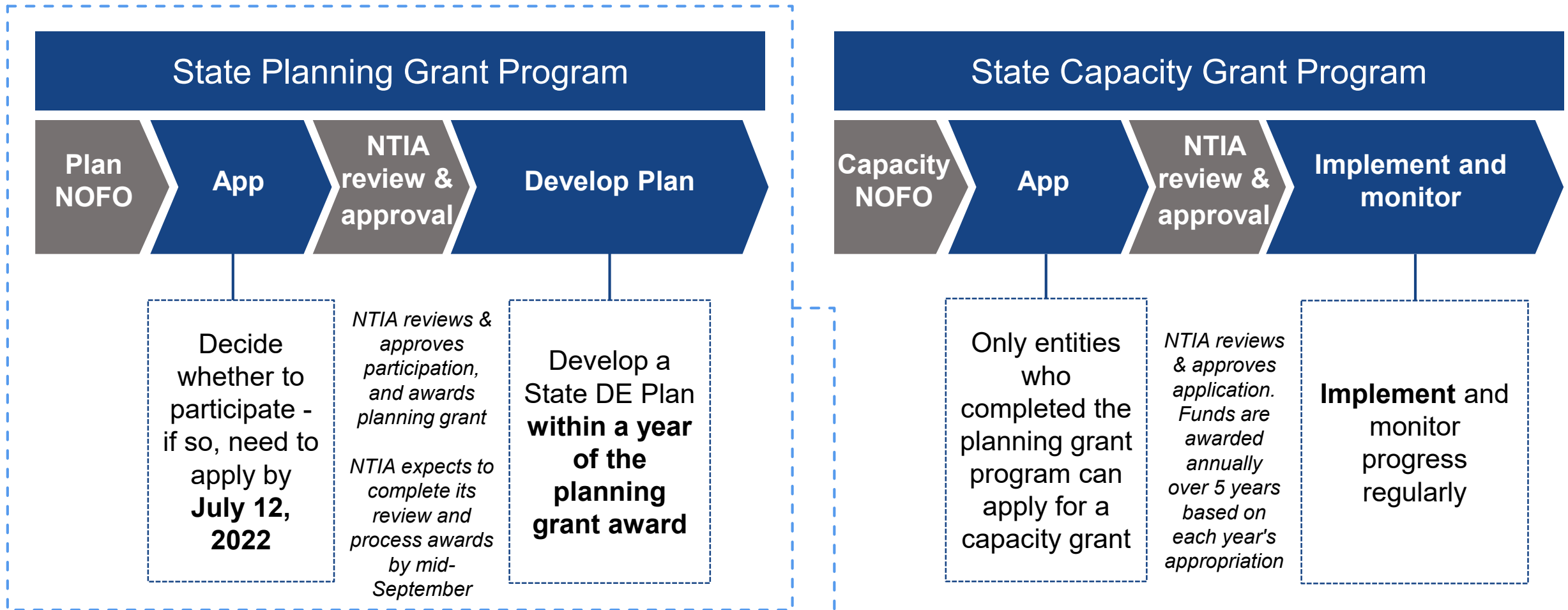
## Submissions process

- Entity must submit a letter of intent rather than application
- After the letter of intent has been submitted, the entity will then receive a separate communication from NTIA about requirements and timelines
- Entities will work closely with NTIA to set budgets and expectations that are reasonable and effective

## Uses of funds

- U.S. territories (other than Puerto Rico) and Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian orgs may use planning funds to develop digital equity plans as well as on related activities described in the entity's approved project budget
- Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian organizations may use planning funds to further their participation and equity interests in the development of relevant State Digital Equity Plans

# States are eligible for two distinct funding streams and must participate in planning to receive capacity grants



Key:  State activity  NTIA activity

Focus of today's webinar

# An administering entity will lead both the planning and implementation processes for States

## Who chooses the AE?

The governor, or equivalent official, of a State selects the administering entity (AE)

## What is the AE's role?

- ✓ Serve as a subrecipient and administering agent of funds
- ✓ Develop, implement, and oversee the State Digital Equity Plan
- ✓ Work with State to make subgrants to local govt and community orgs to support the State Digital Equity Plan
- ✓ Serve as an advocate for digital equity policy and digital inclusion activities and as a repository of best practice materials

## Who can serve as an AE?

- ✓ State, political subdivision, agency, or a Tribal / Native entity located in the State
- ✓ Institution that is a non-profit that provides services in the State and is not a school
- ✓ Community anchor institution, other than a school, that is located in the State
- ✓ Local educational agencies located in the State
- ✓ Workforce development entities located in the State
- ✓ An agency of the State that is responsible for administering or supervising adult education and literacy
- ✓ Public housing authorities located in the State
- ✓ A partnership of those listed above

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# FUNDING FORMULA AND USES OF FUNDS

# NTIA will allocate planning grant funds according to a statutory formula

Criteria	Description	Percent
Total Population	The population of the eligible State in proportion to the total population of all eligible States	50
Covered Population <sup>1</sup>	The number of individuals in the eligible State who are members of covered pops. in proportion to the total number of individuals in all eligible States who are members of covered populations	25
Lack of availability and adoption of broadband	Based on the comparative lack of availability and adoption of broadband in the eligible State in proportion to the lack of availability and adoption of broadband of all eligible States	25
Availability	Proportion of residents in a location where fixed, non-satellite broadband is unavailable at speeds of 25/3 Mbps (metric will be updated for any new FCC standards).	5
Computer & Broadband Subscription in household	Proportion of residents that live in a household that lacks either a desktop/laptop/tablet computer or high-speed Internet	5
Individual Internet Use	Proportion of residents who do not use the Internet from any location	7.5
Individual Device Use	Percentage of residents who do not use a desktop/laptop/tablet computer	7.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

At least 1% of available funds will be set aside for grants to U.S. territories and possessions and at least 5% of available funds will be set aside for grants to Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian orgs

1. The term “covered populations” means: (i) individuals who live in households with family incomes below 150% of the poverty threshold; (ii) aging individuals; (iii) incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility; (iv) veterans; (v) individuals with disabilities; (vi) individuals with a language barrier, including those with low English proficiency and those with low levels of literacy; (vii) individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and (viii) individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. NTIA Covered Populations map: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/community-resilience-estimates/partnerships/ntia.html>



# Although the NOFO includes tentative award amounts, allocations may change

## Challenges to awards

NOFO includes **tentative** award allocation amounts, but States may challenge their allocations as determined by the funding formula

Eligible entities were able to submit a challenge **within 14 days of the NOFO's publication (May 27, 2022)**, which includes a letter to the Assistant Secretary, signed by the governor or equivalent official, that details the error or defect in the formula's application. NTIA provided additional guidance on the challenge process, including through technical assistance

Assistant Secretary will make a determination and respond to the State within 21 days

## Revisions may be necessary

If the Assistant Secretary decides to recalculate formula amounts, they will notify the other States of amended award amounts

NTIA will then provide States with instructions regarding the **revised application materials required** for review (e.g., budgets) and the associated award process for their application

Funding allocations listed the NOFO could also **change based on the number of applicants** that apply for funding and changes to the funding allocations could **occur prior to or after an award has been made**

# Planning grant funds can be used for two purposes, which both involve developing the State Digital Equity Plan



Developing the State Digital Equity Plan










Making subgrants to entities (e.g., municipalities, nonprofits, community anchor institutions, local educational agencies, or other orgs representing covered populations) to help develop the State Digital Equity Plan

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# STATE DIGITAL EQUITY PLANS

# State Digital Equity Plan components (I/II)

-  1 The **identification of the barriers to digital equity** faced by covered populations
-  2 **Measurable objectives for documenting & promoting** broadband technology; the online accessibility of public resources and services; digital literacy; secure online privacy / cybersecurity; consumer devices and tech support
-  3 An assessment of how the **objectives will impact and interact** with the State's economic and workforce goals; health, education and civic engagement outcomes; and delivery of other essential services
-  4 A description of how the State **plans to collaborate with key stakeholders** (e.g., anchor institutions, municipal government, educational agencies, non-profits) to achieve objectives
-  5 A list of organizations with which the administering entity for the State **collaborated in developing and implementing the Plan**
-  6 A stated **vision for digital equity**
-  7 A **digital equity needs assessment**, including an assessment of the baseline and the State's identification of the barriers to digital equity

# State Digital Equity Plan components (II/II)



8

An **asset inventory**, including current resources and strategies that promote digital equity and existing digital equity plans and programs



9

A **coordination and outreach strategy**, including opportunities for public comment by, collaboration with, and ongoing engagement with the covered populations and the full range of stakeholders



10

Description of how **municipal, regional, and/or tribal digital plans will be incorporated**



11

An **implementation strategy** (1) establishing measurable goals, objectives, proposed core activities, (2) setting out measures ensuring the plan's sustainability, and (3) adopting mechanisms to ensure that the plan is regularly evaluated and updated



12

Explanation of how the strategy **addresses gaps in existing efforts** to address barriers to digital equity



13

Description of how the State intends to accomplish the implementation strategy by **partnering with workforce organizations and institutions of higher learning**



14

A **timeline** for implementation of the Plan



15

Material indicating how the State will coordinate its use of Digital Equity Capacity Grant funding and **Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding**

State Digital Equity Plans may propose a variety of digital inclusion activities to later be implemented with capacity grant funds

## Example Uses of State Planning Grant Program funds

Develop or update State Digital Equity Plans to include:

- Pursuing digital inclusion activities
- Facilitating adoption of broadband
- Implementing training and workforce development programs
- Providing equipment and software for broadband services
- Constructing or upgrading public access computer centers

# Eligible entities are required to engage with key stakeholders as a part of developing State Digital Equity Plans

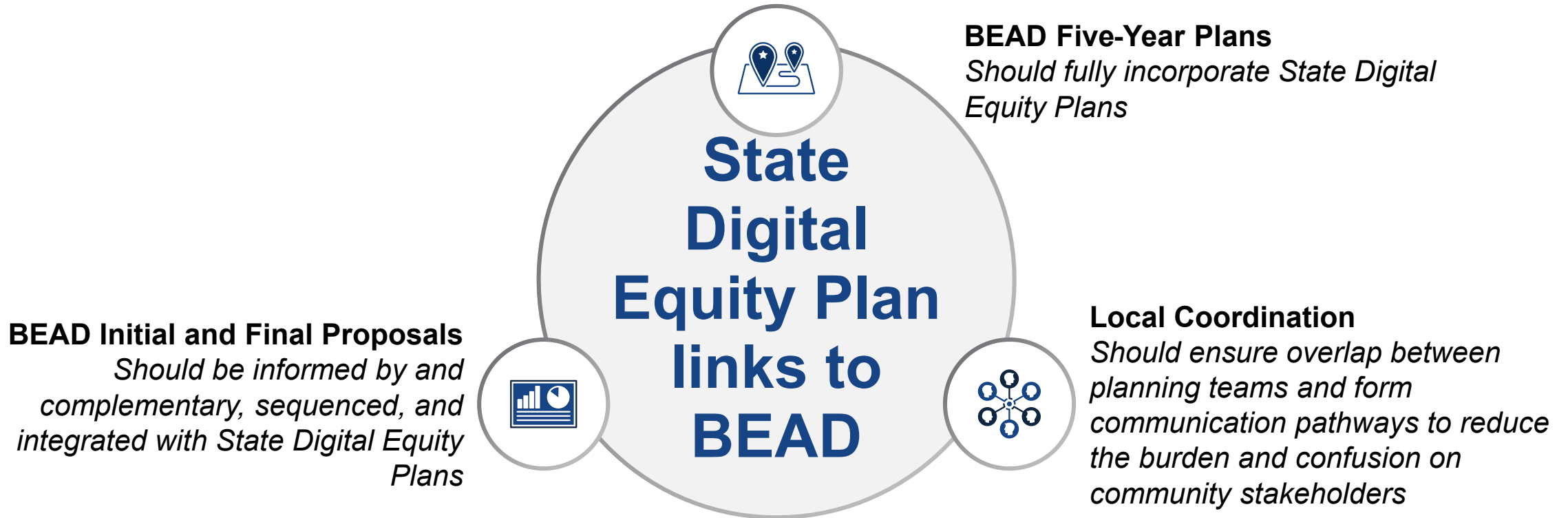
## Key stakeholder groups may include:

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- Community anchor institutions
- County and municipal governments
- Local educational agencies
- Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, or Native Hawaiian organizations, where applicable
- Nonprofit organizations
- Organizations that represent covered populations
- Civil rights organizations
- Entities that carry out workforce development programs
- State agencies that administer or supervise adult education or literacy activities
- Public housing authorities

# State Digital Equity Plans are closely linked to requirements for the BEAD Program

States and territories should view the State Planning Grant Program NOFO and the BEAD NOFO holistically under a **singular, unified objective of closing the digital divide**





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# APPLICATION COMPONENTS AND PROCESS

# To participate in the Planning Program, States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia must submit applications by July 12

## Application requirements

- Description of the administering entity (AE)
- Certification that AE will submit Plan in 1yr of funding
- Statutory assurances with respect to the AE
- Narrative of the project and activities to be funded and how they will support the Plans' development
- Budget information, incl. necessity & basis for costs
- Standard grant forms



## NTIA Application portal

Applications must be received through the NTIA Application Portal no later than 11:59 p.m. EDT on July 12, 2022

*Please contact [digitalequity@ntia.gov](mailto:digitalequity@ntia.gov) with any questions and [ngphelpdesk@ntia.gov](mailto:ngphelpdesk@ntia.gov) for technical support with the portal*

# Once submitted, applications will undergo the following review process



## Initial eligibility and administrative review

Conducted by NTIA Program Office staff

Review ensures that applicant is eligible for funding and that the application is complete

If missing certain information or documentation, NTIA may ask for any missing or incomplete materials

## Merit review

Merit reviewers are technically and professionally qualified to conduct reviews (may or may not be a federal employee)

Review ensures conformity with program objectives, eligible activities, and related costs

Applicants may be asked to clarify or further substantiate their applications

## Selection

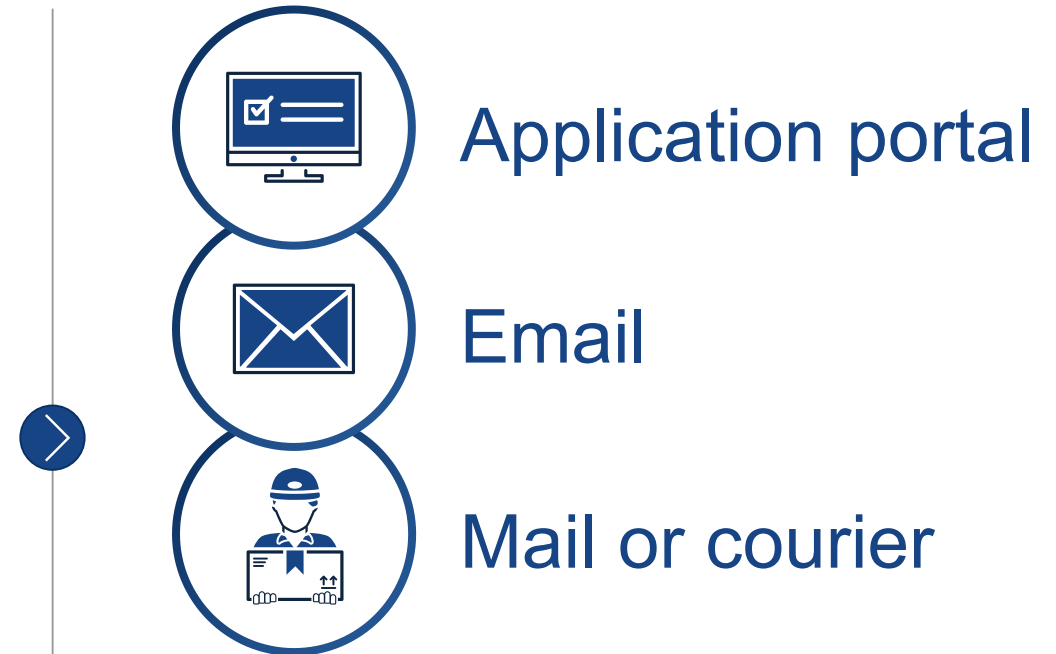
The Department of Commerce will make final approvals and issue awards

# Territories and Tribal / Native entities apply for planning funds through a different process, using Letters of Intent

## Letter of Intent requirements

- Signature of the governor or governing body
- Description of the entity that would administer digital equity activities under the program
- List of specific activities they intend to pursue in support of digital equity plan development

NTIA will then provide additional submission information and timelines in a **separate written communication**



Applications must be received or postmarked no later than 11:59 p.m. EDT on July 12, 2022

# Next steps for applicants related to the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program

- 1 Prepare an application or letter of intent for the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program by July 12
- 2 Submit questions to [DigitalEquity@ntia.gov](mailto:DigitalEquity@ntia.gov)
- 3 Attend future NTIA webinars and engage with NTIA Technical Assistance for guidance across programs

# For specific inquiries, please contact the appropriate office

## Programmatic inquiries

Angela Thi Bennett  
Digital Equity Director  
Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230  
Phone: (202) 482-2048  
Email: [digitalequity@ntia.gov](mailto:digitalequity@ntia.gov)

## Grant management inquiries

Mercedes Ernest Martinez  
Grants Management Specialist  
Grants Management Division  
National Institute of Standards and Technology  
Email:  
[mercedes.martinez@nist.gov](mailto:mercedes.martinez@nist.gov)

## Media inquiries

Stephen F. Yusko  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Office of Public Affairs  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW,  
Room 4897  
Washington, DC 20230  
Phone: (202) 482-7002  
Email: [press@ntia.doc.gov](mailto:press@ntia.doc.gov)

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# APPENDIX

# General reporting requirements

## Bipartisan Infrastructure Law requirement

Grantees must publicly report, annually during grant performance, on:

- How it used the grant
- Its progress toward fulfilling the grant's objectives
- Implementation of its State Digital Equity Plan

## Financial reporting requirement

- Must submit an SF-425, Federal Financial Report on a semi-annual basis (periods ending March 31 and September 30)
- Final financial report is due within 120 days after the end of the project period

## Performance (technical) reporting requirement

- Must submit a technical progress report on a semi-annual basis (periods ending March 31 and September 30)
- Technical progress reports must contain information as prescribed in [2 C.F.R. § 200.329](#) and Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, Section A.01

**The Assistant Secretary may establish additional reporting requirements for any recipient as is necessary to fulfill statutory requirements. Further instructions will also be provided on where and how to submit reports.**



