Implementing the Digital Equity Act: What Workforce and Education Advocates Need to Know about Digital Inclusion

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March 22, 2022
PANELISTS

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About our organizations
Why this webinar?
Digital Equity Act: an opportunity for skills advocates
Digital inclusion field: expertise and potential partners
How you can take action
Q&A
ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND
NSC’S VISION

- Jobs that require skills training are the backbone of our economy.

- National Skills Coalition fights for a national commitment to inclusive, high-quality skills training so that more people have access to a better life, and more local businesses see sustained growth.
Since 2000, through expert analysis and technical assistance, broad-based organizing, targeted advocacy, and cutting-edge communications, NSC has changed hundreds of state and federal skills policies that have changed thousands of lives and grown local businesses and economies.
NSC’S NETWORKS

National Network
State Network
Business Leaders
ABOUT NDIA

A unified voice for home and public broadband, personal devices, and local technology training and support programs.

600+ Affiliates  44 States
ABOUT NDIA

- Practitioner Support
- Policy
- Awareness
- Data & Research
Digital Equity

Individuals and communities have IT capacity for full participation in society, democracy and economy.

Digital Inclusion

Activities necessary for full participation:

- Affordable home broadband
- Appropriate devices
- Digital literacy
- Tech support
- Applications
THE SOLUTION

Affordable Broadband
Affordable Devices
Digital Literacy Trainings
WHO IS NOT CONNECTED?

36 MILLION US HOUSEHOLDS
Do not have wireline broadband connections*

* cable, DSL or fiber

26 MILLION
Households in URBAN Areas

10 MILLION
Households in RURAL Areas

U.S. Census, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B28002
WHY THIS WEBINAR?
NSC-NDIA COLLABORATION IN ACTION

- **Introduce** adult education, higher education, workforce development, and digital inclusion advocates to each other

- Flag upcoming opportunities for **collaboration** on Digital Equity Act implementation (e.g. state plans)

- Encourage **partnership** as appropriate on state policy and federal implementation

- Identify **advocacy opportunities** to strengthen digital skills policy
YOU’VE SHOWED US YOU WANT TO ENGAGE

➢ Public comments to NTIA on the Digital Equity Act (submitted in February 2022 – thank you!)

➢ Enthusiastic attendance at NSC’s December 2021 webinar on Digital Equity (and earlier webinars)

➢ High-profile participation in February 2022 Skills Summit plenary session on digital skills (featuring Sen. Tim Kaine)

➢ Robust engagement with NSC’s 2020 digital equity policy recommendations for states
DIGITAL EQUITY ACT:
Opportunities for skills advocates
DIGITAL EQUITY ACT

$1.5 BILLION (combined)

- $60M: State Planning Grants
- $1.44B: State Capacity Grants
STATE DIGITAL EQUITY CAPACITY GRANT PROGRAM

**Total Allocated:** $1.5 Billion (60m planning grants + 1.44b capacity grants)
- Capacity Grants: 50% population; 25% covered member population; 25% adoption + availability

**Program Administrator:** National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

**Eligible Administering Entities:**
- The State, a political subdivision of the State, an Indian Tribe, a Native Hawaiian organization.
- A foundation, corporation, institution, association, or coalition that is— (i) a not-for-profit entity; (ii) providing services in the State; and (iii) not a school.
- A community anchor institution, other than a school
- A local educational agency.
- An entity that carries out a workforce development program.
- An agency of the State that is responsible for administering or supervising adult education and literacy activities in the State.
- A public or multi-family housing authority.
- A partnership between any of the preceding entities.

**Eligible Subgrantees:** Other eligible administering entities
COVERED POPULATIONS

- individuals who live in covered households (i.e., households with income less than or equal to 150 percent of federal poverty level);
- aging individuals;
- incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility;
- veterans;
- individuals with disabilities;
- individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who—
  - are English learners; and
  - have low levels of literacy;
- individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and
- individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.
STATE DIGITAL EQUITY CAPACITY GRANT PROGRAM

State Digital Equity Plan

- Identification of barriers to digital equity for covered populations
- Measurable objectives for documenting and promoting digital inclusion activities
- Assessment how objectives will impact and interact with the State’s other objectives (ie. economic development, health outcomes, etc.)
- Description of State’s plan to collaborate with key stakeholders
- List of organizations State collaborated with on developing and implementing plan
DIGITAL EQUITY ACT: TIMELINE

State Digital Equity Capacity Program

1. Request for Comments - Soon
2. Notice of Funding Opportunity - 180 days after IIJA
3. Application Window - 60 days
4. Planning Grant Award
5. Plan Development - 12 months
6. Capacity Grants - After Planning
DIGITAL EQUITY COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Total Allocated: $1.25 Billion ($250m per FY for 5 FYs)

Program Administrator: National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

Eligible Grantees:
- A political subdivision, agency, or instrumentality of a State, including an agency of a State that is responsible for administering or supervising adult education and literacy activities, or for providing public housing
- An Indian Tribe, an Alaska Native entity, or a Native Hawaiian organization.
- A foundation, corporation, institution, or association that is a not-for-profit entity and not a school.
- A community anchor institution.
- A local educational agency.
- An entity that carries out a workforce development program.
- A partnership between any of the preceding entities.
- A partnership between any of the preceding entities and an entity that the Assistant Secretary determines to be in the public interest; and is not a school. (Cannot be or have been an administering entity under the Capacity Grant Program)

Eligible Subgrantees: N/A
Use of Funds: An entity shall use the grant amounts to support not less than 1 of the following activities:

- To develop and implement digital inclusion activities that benefit covered populations.
- To facilitate the adoption of broadband by covered populations in order to provide educational and employment opportunities to those populations.
- To implement (I) training programs for covered populations that cover basic, advanced, and applied skills; or (II) other workforce development programs.
- To make available equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, or digital network technology for broadband services to covered populations at low or no cost.
- To construct, upgrade, expend, or operate new or existing public access computing centers for covered populations through community anchor institutions.
Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program

1. Request for Comments-Soon
2. Not later than 30 days after capacity grants go out, and not before, the Assistant Secretary shall establish Competitive Grant Program
3. Notice of Funding Opportunity-TBD
4. Eligible grantees must submit an application at such time as the Assistant Secretary may require
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SKILLS ADVOCATES?

➢ Now is the time to connect with your governor’s office

➢ Get to the table for your state Digital Equity Planning Process

➢ Advocate for your state to replicate innovative practices even while waiting for federal rollout (e.g. Hawaii’s recent digital skills survey of state residents)

➢ Identify and engage with digital inclusion partners
USE NSC RESOURCES TO MAKE YOUR CASE:

Digital skills fact sheets by industry (Summer 2021):

- Manufacturing
- Retail & hospitality
- Health & social work
- Construction, transportation & storage

Full report:
www.tinyurl.com/BoostingDL
The New Landscape of Digital Literacy

How workers’ uneven digital skills affect economic mobility and business competitiveness, and what policymakers can do about it.

Get more data and recommendations in our full report: tinyurl.com/NLDigitalLiteracy
THE DIGITAL INCLUSION FIELD:
Expertise and potential partners
DIGITAL INCLUSION

Affordable Broadband

Affordable Devices

Digital Literacy Trainings
Digital Navigator

Program model to provide one-to-one basic digital inclusion services (connectivity assistance, device assistance, basic digital skills support) over the phone.

- Learner-Centered Approaches
- Asynchronous and Live Instruction
- Replicable, Open, Iterative Model

“Being involved in this project has affirmed and personalized the digital needs of our communities. I was aware of the need for services before simply by observing it in-person, but now I have a story attached to each individual with whom I speak.”
Amanda Perry, Digital Navigator
Digital Inclusion Ecosystem: Indicators

- Existence of programs and policies addressing all aspects of the digital divide
- Affordable and subsidized devices and broadband service options that meet the community’s needs
- Multilingual digital literacy and digital skill trainings that meet the community’s needs
Digital Inclusion Ecosystem: Indicators

- Hardware and software technical support
- Digital navigation services to guide residents to the above services
- Collaboration: Entities providing local digital inclusion services, policymakers, advocates, social service providers and community leaders co-create solutions in partnership with the community
ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES: Advocacy opportunities
ADVOCACY

130 Hill meetings as part of #SkillsSummit2022

Business partners will take to Congress April 4-6 #BLUontheHill2022

How we're engaging Congress

• Investment
• Industry sector partnerships
• WIOA reauthorization
• Short term training (JOBS Act)
Bipartisan JOBS Act amendment moving forward in Congressional "competitiveness" package

Expands federal financial aid to short term, high quality training programs

Key for digital literacy programs, workers, and businesses
WATCH THIS SPACE!

- JOBS Act sign-on letter deadline March 31
  - Complementary advocacy campaign
  - Passionate about short term Pell? Email Caroline!

- Upcoming: "Summit Sequel" on Digital Equity
  - State examples, newest information
  - Date/time TBD

- Reskilling/upskilling bill – end of summer?

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorization
STAY IN TOUCH

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THANK YOU!

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