



Approved New Jersey Digital Equity Plan

Plan summary and overview





1 Overview of the Digital Equity Act

The Digital Equity Act (“DEA”) focuses on eight “Covered Populations”

The DEA identifies eight groups as being especially vulnerable to digital equity challenges

Covered Population	NTIA Description (link to source)
1. Low-income households	Referred to in the DEA as individuals who live in "covered households", or households' whole income is not more than 150% of the poverty level. This is defined as a household of three individuals with total income at or below ~ \$35,000 in New Jersey as of 2023.
2. Aging individuals	Individuals age 60 or older.
3. Incarcerated individuals	Individuals incarcerated in state -level prisons or detention centers. Though not required by NTIA, the New Jersey Digital Equity Plan will also prioritize serving returning citizens with digital equity resources and programs.
4. Veterans	All persons aged 18 years and who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.
5. Individuals with disabilities	All persons who have 1. A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; 2. A record of such an impairment; or 3. Being regarded as having such an impairment.
6. English language-learners	English learners are defined as individuals who speak a language other than English at home and speak English less than "very well" and/or individuals with low levels of English literacy.
7. Communities of color	Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group. Though not required by NTIA, the New Jersey Digital Equity Plan will also prioritize tribes that are state-recognized, even if not federally recognized.
8. Rural residents	Individuals who primarily reside in any area other than: 1. A city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; 2. Any urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and 3. in the case of a grant or direct loan, a city, town, or incorporated area that has a population of greater than 20,000 inhabitants.



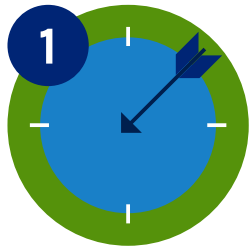
2 Overview of New Jersey's Draft Digital Equity Plan



New Jersey has defined a vision for digital equity and four corresponding goals

New Jersey's digital equity vision is for every resident to have the confidence and competence to harness the power of the internet, devices, and digitally accessible services. Digital equity can help New Jersey bridge economic and achievement disparities among all residents, enabling them to lead fulfilling lives with dignity.

Goals



Ensure access to **affordable high-speed Internet** for every New Jerseyan



Ensure that every New Jerseyan has the **confidence and competence** they need to use computers and the internet to achieve their goals



Ensure that every New Jerseyan has **access to devices, software, assistive technologies, training, and technical support**



Ensure that every New Jerseyan has **efficient and effective digital experiences** with state government

NTIA Feedback



NTIA Feedback

New Jersey Response

Expand on the description of long-term objectives to include objectives specific to enhancing economic growth and job creation.

Added the following Language:

Scale New Jersey's workforce to meet the potential shortage of skilled workers required to support broadband deployment

Partner with workforce development organizations to support the infrastructure workforce development needs of broadband providers

The narrative provided specific information about the scoring approach for competitive grants, these details needed to be included alongside the rubric so potential applicants could reference State's DE Plan. Changes were required for the Fair Labor Practices category as the scoring criteria designed negatively impacted new entrants to the market and did not provide a mechanism for mitigation

Updated fair labor scoring language to ensure all applicants have the option of getting the total 20 available, by setting a ceiling of 20 and additional points for future commitments that new entrants can access. Those without a track record of employment practices can get the full 20 points based on the strength of their forward looking commitments

Please add language that states that prospective subgrantees will need to certify that they possess the operational capacity to qualify to complete and operate the project

Updated language to specifically state that prospective subgrantees will need to certify that they possess the operational capacity to qualify to complete and operate the project

NTIA Feedback

New Jersey Response

Please provide additional detail as to how (i.e. documentation, process, etc) NJ will ensure prospective subgrantees have the financial, managerial, technical, and operational capacity to meet commitments under the subgrant, Program requirements, and other requirements prescribed by the Assistant Secretary and New Jersey

Added language to say that DCA and PHA are local units of government and therefore well versed at running grants

Please add a description of what will happen to New Jersey's low-cost plan approach if the Affordable Connectivity Program (or a successor program) is no longer available.

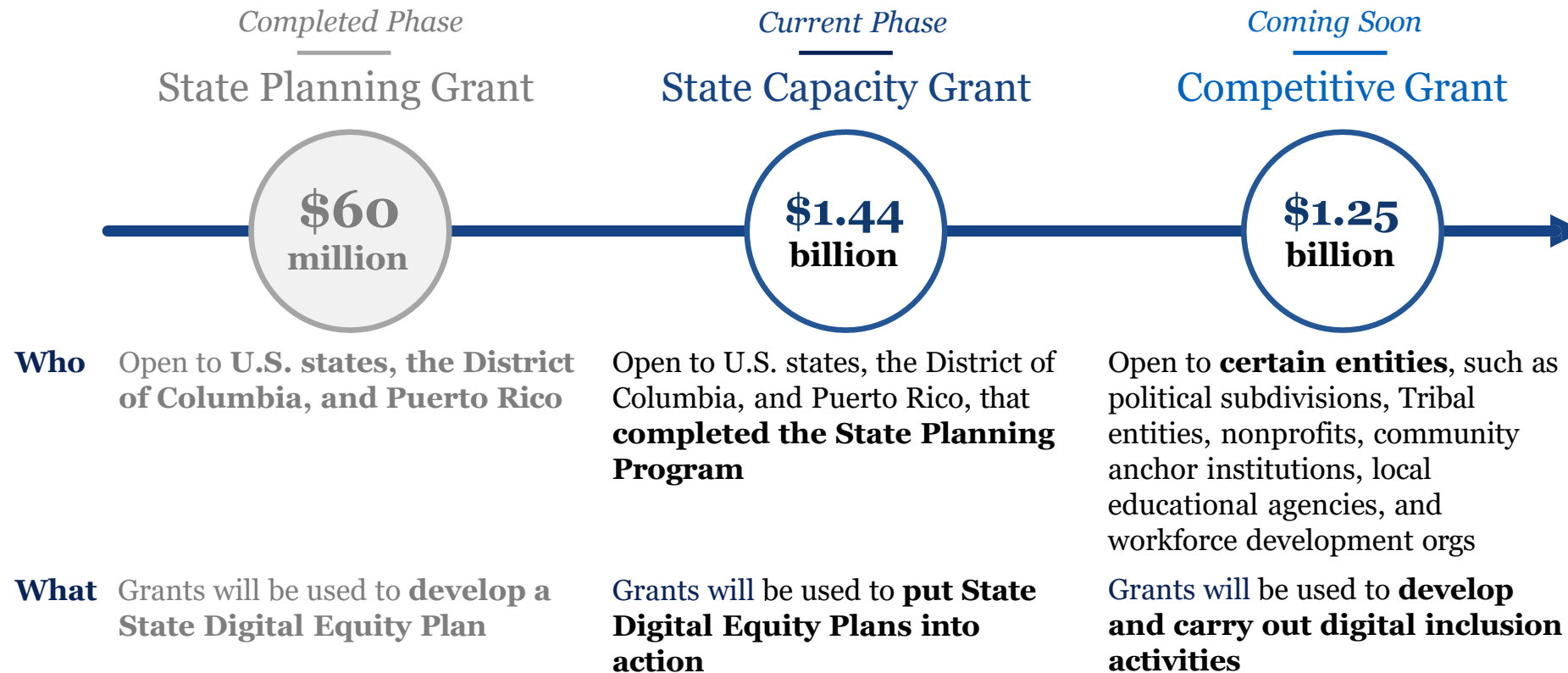
Included language to reflect analysis of what could happen if ACP goes away, including a couple of potential outcomes (in 2.12.1.h)

What is Next...

Digital Equity Capacity Grant



Three Programs to Promote Digital Inclusion & Advance Equity



Purpose of the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program

The purpose of the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program is to **create the conditions where individuals and communities have the information technology capacity** that is needed **for full participation** in the society and economy of the United States¹.

This Program will **make funds available** for States and Territories **to begin implementing their *accepted* State and U.S. Territory Digital Equity Plans** (and related purposes as detailed in the NOFO).

COVERED POPULATIONS ²



Individuals who live in **covered households** (defined as households with **income of not more than 150% of the poverty level**)



Aging individuals aged 60 and older



Incarcerated individuals (as defined by the State or Territory), 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



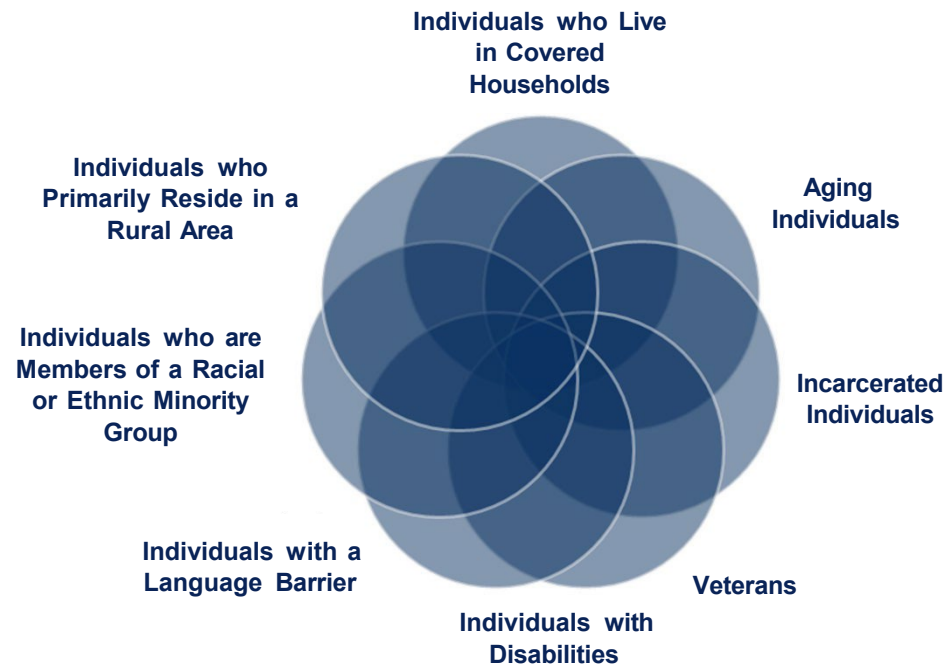
Individuals who are members of a **racial or ethnic minority group**; and



Individuals who primarily reside in a **rural area**

Intersectionality of Covered Populations

Individuals can embody multiple identities. The Capacity Grant Program is intended to support States and Territories as they serve Covered Populations, many of which may have overlapping identities and needs.



Integration with BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment)



Integration with the BEAD Program

The Digital Equity Act is closely tied to the broader infrastructure deployment goals of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program¹.



What is BEAD?

The BEAD program is a historic, last mile investment for:

-  **Broadband Planning,**
-  **Deployment,**
-  **Mapping,**
-  **Equity,**
-  **Adoption, and**
-  **Meaningful use projects.**

How do they Relate?

The two programs complement each other and require high levels of coordination to make sure **resources are working in a non-duplicative manner**. States, Territories, and Native Entities should do the following to reinforce coordination:

-  Establish **formal and direct communications and collaboration pathways**
-  Ensure projects are **coordinated with other broadband-related projects**

This is important to **reduce the burden and confusion on community stakeholders** when fulfilling the local coordination, outreach, and stakeholder engagement requirements of both programs.

1. SDECGP NOFO Section I.B

Use of Digital Equity Funds

Eligible States and Territories must use their State Digital Equity Capacity Grant funds for specific purposes that are outlined in the NOFO. **Those with a * indicate additional guidance will be provided.**

ELIGIBLE USES OF FUNDS :



**Updating or
Maintaining Plans**



**Making
Subgrants***



**Implementing
Plans**



Evaluation*



**Administrative
Costs***

Examples of Capacity Grant Program Allowable Uses

Digital Equity grantees can use their funds in multiple ways to achieve the equitable adoption of high-speed internet and empower their communities to learn and the services they provide to grow₁.



Digital Literacy and Skills Training | *Encourage digital literacy and skills programs that provide training and education to members of the Covered Populations*



E-Government and Civic Engagement | *Develop digital tools that enable online community engagement and that empower individuals to participate in the democratic process*



Device Deployment Programs | *Coordinate deployment of accessible devices such as laptops, smartphones, tablets, or other internet-enabled devices for those that need it most*



Economic Development | *Support digital entrepreneurship, online job training, and remote work opportunities to foster economic empowerment and reduce disparities*



Online Access to Health and Mental Wellness Services | *Build or strengthen tools that directly help patients and end users within the Covered Populations to access healthcare services online*



Online Accessibility | *Coach programs to ensure that websites and applications are designed with accessibility in mind*



Access to Affordable Broadband Service | *Promote programs to provide low-cost services*

Measuring Success



Measuring Success and Program Evaluation

Capacity Grant recipients and subrecipients are required to incorporate **program evaluation activities** to understand **population level outcomes**. More content is continued on the next slide.

Evaluation Criteria¹



Number of **Covered Population(s)** served



Number of **people served within each Covered Population**



Total number of people served



Number of programs implemented by type



Anecdotal/personal testimony demonstrating the positive impact of the Program



Quantifiable evidence of progress toward the measurable objectives identified in the Digital Equity Plan

¹ Internet For All
1. SDECGP NOFO Section II.A.3

Key Dates to Remember

Application submission and grant award dates for the Capacity Grant Program are described in the NOFO₁.



Period of Performance

States and US Territories will be able to spend down grant funds during the **5-year period of performance beginning on the date when the State is awarded grant funds.**



Application Due Date

Applications are due by the following dates for...:

- States, D.C. and Puerto Rico: 60 days after the NOFO is released, **May 28, 2024**
- U.S. Territories: The due date for US Territories' Capacity Grant Applications is **July 31, 2024**
- Native Entities: 315 days after the NOFO is released; the Native Entity application window opens September 25, 2024 and **closes February 7, 2025**



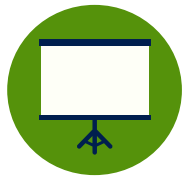
Issuing Awards

NTIA expects to begin issuing awards to Eligible States on a rolling basis **no later than August 28, 2024.**

We want to hear from you



Read the approved plan, e
on [the OBC website](#)



Attend the Office of
Broadband Connectivity
webinar on **May 15, 2024**
at **11:00am** .



If you have any questions,
please direct inquiries to:
BROADBAND@bpu.nj.gov

