THE CENTER
FOR ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITY
& BELONGING

The Center for Economic Opportunity and Belonging Digital Access Plan Recommendation 2.0

(October 2023)

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Grantee Profile: The Center for Economic Opportunity and Belonging (CEOB, or the Center) is a resource to tackle the disparities and lack of access to opportunity experienced by many communities, including those of color. The Center spearheads robust community engagement while leveraging public and private investments and conducts rigorous evaluation and monitoring to translate effective pilot strategies into enduring structures. The Center is uniquely positioned to catalyze, communicate, and activate investments contributing to transformational change.

The Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity (Go Utah) houses the Utah Immigration Assistance Center, which provides resources to:

- Develop and implement a statewide strategy for immigrant integration that promotes economic opportunities for immigrant communities in Utah.
- Coordinate with state agencies on developing and administering policies and programs related to immigrant integration.
- Assist individuals and businesses in Utah with identifying pathways for recruiting and retaining international employees and the foreign labor process.
- A task force to review and make recommendations to the regarding state policies on immigration, developing and sustain relationships with local officials, the business sector, and community stakeholders.
- Advise and recommend to the governor, state agencies, and legislature regarding immigrant integration and foreign labor issues.

Executive Summary

This initial recommendation represents the combined efforts of the Center for Economic Opportunity and Belonging (Grant Lead) and the Governor's Office of Immigration and Integration (Grant Partner). This document will collectively refer to the grant team as "The Center" for simplicity.

- Key Definitions:

Digital Access is the ability to fully participate in a digital society. It includes access to tools and technologies, such as Internet and computers, that allow for full participation.[1]

Digital Equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.[2]

Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This includes five elements:

1. Affordable, robust broadband internet service;
2. Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
3. Access to digital literacy training;
4. Quality technical support; and
5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.[3]

As technology continues to advance rapidly, it becomes imperative for the concept of Digital Access and Inclusion to evolve accordingly. This evolution involves adapting strategies and making investments that address the historical, institutional, and structural barriers that hinder access to and use of technology. These barriers can include socioeconomic status, race, gender, and geography, influencing access to education, infrastructure, and resources. Overcoming historical barriers requires acknowledging and addressing the systemic inequalities that have marginalized specific communities, often leaving them disadvantaged regarding digital access and skills.

Institutional barriers encompass policies, regulations, and practices that may unintentionally or intentionally limit access to technology. These barriers can manifest through restrictive licensing requirements, limited availability of affordable broadband connectivity, or exclusionary practices in education and employment. To achieve Digital Inclusion, intentional strategies must be implemented to identify and remove these institutional barriers, ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals.

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[1] https://upward-mobility.urban.org/digital-access#:~:text=Digital%20access%20is%20the%20ability,that%20allow%20for%20full%20participation.

[2] https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/

[3] https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/

Structural barriers pertain to the physical infrastructure and technical aspects that impact digital access. This includes issues such as limited or unreliable internet connectivity, lack of affordable hardware devices, and inadequate digital literacy programs. Advancements in technology necessitate continual efforts to bridge the digital divide by providing robust and accessible infrastructure, affordable devices, and comprehensive training programs to enhance digital skills.

To ensure Digital Inclusion in an evolving technological landscape, intentional strategies and investments are vital. These efforts should include:

1. **Broadening infrastructure:** Governments, organizations, and service providers should collaborate to expand broadband connectivity to underserved areas, improving internet access for marginalized communities.
2. **Affordability initiatives:** Ensuring that digital devices, software, and internet services are affordable for individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds. This can be achieved through subsidy programs or partnerships with private entities.
3. **Education and digital literacy:** Implementing comprehensive and inclusive digital literacy programs that provide individuals with the skills and knowledge to effectively use technology. This includes training on basic computer skills, internet usage, online safety, and critical thinking.
4. **Collaboration and partnerships:** Governments, nonprofits, community organizations, and private sectors should collaborate to pool resources, share knowledge, and work towards common goals of Digital Inclusion. Partnerships can facilitate the development and implementation of effective strategies.

By evolving Digital Inclusion strategies to keep pace with technological advancements, society can minimize the disparities caused by historical, institutional, and structural barriers. Through intentional efforts and investments, we can build an inclusive digital society where everyone has equal opportunities to access and leverage technology for personal, educational, and professional advancement.

- Vision

All individuals have an equitable opportunity to utilize technology to live, learn work, and thrive. A comprehensive approach to statewide digital accessibility will incorporate the three key elements of digital equity: Broadband Internet Access, Computers and Devices, and Digital Literacy and Skill Building.

- Population focus
    - New Americans and Refugees
    - Rural Areas
    - Other historically underserved communities and individuals

- Those least likely to receive digital equity without intentionally bringing them into this space during the planning and rollout of the plan.

- Key Challenges

Broadband Internet Access:

- Limited existing broadband network, especially in rural areas.
- Prohibitive costs, unfavorable contract requirements, confusion regarding ACP qualification and enrollment, language barriers, and general digital skill training.
- Planning that does not include strategies to grow the digital workforce pool will have only short-term value and risk competing for the same existing pool with other state priorities (i.e., electric car plants applying for DOE grants will potentially need the same fiber-optics workers etc.)
- Quality of service is currently limited by the range of broadband service (rural) and in areas with high internet traffic (population density)
- ISP support services may not consider diverse community needs.

Computer Devices

- Underserved communities lack affordable and reliable devices to access broadband connectivity.
- A very limited number of existing programs and providers for devices or easily accessible support for devices.
- Lack of accurate, centralized, and well-maintained asset map for these services.

Digital Literacy and Skill Building

- Lack of digital skills, especially in historically underserved communities, will blunt any efforts for statewide digital equity because these populations may not be able to access the technology, even if it can technically reach them.
- Few existing programs and providers for digital skills literacy or workforce upskilling.
- Lack of accurate, centralized, and well-maintained asset map for these services.
- Digital skill development programs are limited to basic skills, with no opportunity for advancement or incorporation into home and work life.

- Language and cultural barriers to any digital skill planning that is not thoughtful and nuanced.

- Employers need more resources to gauge and improve existing workforce skills.

- Employers cannot utilize potential workforce pools (foreign credentialing, language barriers, nuanced hiring and training pipelines etc.)

    - BEAD skills focus solely on infrastructure workforce skills rather than a broader equitable approach that extends opportunities to all individuals.

- Goals

    - Ensure that New Americans have representation, access, and engagement opportunity in the Utah State Digital Equity and BEAD planning process.

    - Coordinate efforts of all stakeholders to better plan for both DE/BEAD and the number of other federal grants that the State may apply for. Ensure all stakeholders can incorporate compelling data around the shared workforce pool and asset mapping.
    - Ensure that broad digital skill-building is included in the planning process, expanding workforce skill-building elements beyond limited broadband infrastructure.
    - Ensure that comprehensive Digital Equity is incorporated into eth DE and BEAD planning strategies.
    - Position the State of Utah of the future. Competitive funding opportunities to build on initial workforce and equity elements of the DE and BEAD funds.

    - Our Role:

      The Center will use the following key actions to promote digital inclusion:

1. Lifting up and catalyzing digital inclusion practitioners and advocates actively working in the field.
2. Engage in local, state, and federal advocacy efforts to promote policies that foster digital equity and endorse local strategies for digital inclusion.
3. Educate policymakers, the media, and potential partners about the importance of achieving digital equity and raise awareness about the initiatives undertaken by local digital inclusion programs.

4. Conduct, support, and promote data-gathering and research endeavors that contribute to public understanding, inform public policy decisions, and facilitate the development of community strategies focused on digital inclusion and equity.

UPDATED:

A fundamental element of the State's Digital Connectivity and Equity Planning will be establishing a statewide **Digital Equity Coalition.** The CEOB will serve as the incubator and financial steward of the Coalition until it graduates as an autonomous entity. Incubation will include:

- Forming and coordinating a coalition and growing their capacity ahead of the state's RFPs for an anticipated federal funding pool of several million dollars in early 2024 (BEAD, DE)
- Ensuring planning and implementation of the State's plans and establishing a centralized point of contact for DE efforts for future funds, planning efforts, and community outreach
- Identifying critical gaps in services and community resources for underserved communities
- Establishing a legally structured and self-sustaining organization that can receive funds, host regular meetings, and events
- Developing, managing, and marketing the Utah's digital asset and resource landing page

Deliverables

1. **Digital Equity Coalition Formation**:
    - Coordinated and well-structured coalition.
    - Increased capacity in anticipation of the state's RFPs for potential federal funding in early 2024 (BEAD, DE).
2. **State's Digital Equity Planning**:
    - Effective planning and implementation mechanisms.
    - Establishment of a centralized contact point for all DE endeavors, including fund management, planning, and community outreach.
3. **Gap Analysis**:
    - Comprehensive identification of service and resource deficiencies targeting underserved communities.
    - Recommendations and action plans to address the identified gaps.
4. **Organization Structure**:
    - A legally established entity to manage and oversee the coalition's activities.
    - Provisions to receive funds, organize meetings, and host events seamlessly.
5. **Digital Asset & Resource Management**:
    - Creation of the Utah's digital asset and resource landing page.
    - Efficient management and promotional strategies to maximize the utility and reach of the digital resources.

- Process Description/Partnerships

This planning team has taken several initial steps to determine the current state of digital access in the New American and Refugee community and other underrepresented communities throughout Utah. The planning team includes The Center for Economic Opportunity and Belong, The Governor's Office of Immigration and Integration, and the National Skills Coalition. The activities performed include:

- Promote participation in digital planning efforts[4]
- Survey a section of the population regarding the current state of internet connectivity.[5]
- Bringing to the table existing research that speaks to digital equity.[6]
- Research nationally for opportunities to invest in workforce skills locally[7].
- Conduct a series of statewide focus groups regarding workforce digital skills.
- Coordinate our data-gathering efforts with the Utah Broadband, NTIA, and fellow grantees.

- Existing resources/assets

We have yet to see a comprehensive list of resources for individuals seeking to improve their digital skill set or address other digital equity gaps. We recommend establishing and maintaining a comprehensive asset mapping of these services through the state plan.

- Partnerships

National Skills Coalition, Talent Ready Utah, Economic Development Corporation of Utah

- Implementation plan

We encourage State planners to expand their thinking about BEAD and DE funding to be inclusive and represent a long-term commitment to digital accessibility in Utah. Digital access planning should extend beyond the immediate use of federal funds from DE and BEAD and position the State for competitive funds coming down the pipeline.

We recommend the State build on these limited initial community driven draft plans, and build on them before finalizing any draft.

Deliverables:

[4] https://app.frame.io/presentations/5529e8f5-f32d-4fc9-ab72-b6d91993 1bce?fbclid=IwAR1SlVPGaiXK5wmqGyox4e1UhBLnzlUwk4Snh69UlhO3Zy7sKkB3j8nDOLU

[5] A statewide survey was initiated in May 2023, and finalized in late May 2023. Over 1,000 respondents, primarily focused in New American and Refugee communities. Questions included things like affordability, quality of internet, and availability of support. Analyzed results are being completed in June 2023, and a full report of this survey will be a part of our final recommendation. See attached PowerPoint for high level summary so far.

[6] *Utah Digital Skills Fact Sheet* Attached

[7] EnGen 'Proposal for Utah' This is really just an example of the types of connections the CEOB can help make with national entities ready to maximize BEAD funds for workforce skill investment. Attached

- Focus Groups
- PSA
- Survey
- Outreach/Coalition Building

Focus Groups:
Summary:

1. **Cedar City, Southern Utah University:**
    - Highlighted the generational digital skill gap, the importance of integrating and updating technology in the workplace and academic environments, and the need for more comprehensive training methods.
2. **Utah Tech University, St. George, Utah:**
    - Focused on the prevalent use of technology in various sectors, individual and group adaptation to tech changes, and challenges associated with transitioning and updating tech platforms. It also emphasized the importance of training and the shift in tech use due to the pandemic.
3. **Tech Moms Focus Group:**
    - Centered on the experiences of older women in the tech industry, emphasizing the challenges of navigating diverse digital platforms, the need for inclusivity and representation, and the significance of effective training and communication in businesses.

In essence, all three groups spotlighted the increasing role of technology in both professional and academic settings, the generational differences in tech adaptation, and the pressing need for effective training and inclusivity in the tech landscape.

Cedar City, Southern Utah University (10 participants)

- **Demographics:** Diverse races, LGBTQ+, mix of students and professionals, adults.
- **Digital Skills & Job Applications:**
    - There's an assumption of digital skills during job applications.
    - Noted a generational gap in tech preferences and its influence on workflow.
    - Identified challenges in job listings for non-English speakers and post-COVID home office expectations.
- **Training & Software:**
    - Some software, like “Banner”, lacks user-friendliness and formal training.
    - Importance of leveraging modern tools like Google Suite was stressed.
    - Younger employees are often expected to handle tech issues outside their job scope.
- **Job Skills & Expectations:**
    - Certain job roles expect a wider range of skills.
    - Need to update and standardize training methods was highlighted.
    - Recommendations were made for university software licensing grants.
- **Training Needs & University Infrastructure:**

    - There were calls for group training, standardized onboarding, and improved campus Wi-Fi.
    - Formal training for standard systems like “Banner” was emphasized.
- **Overall:** The feedback emphasized the generational digital skill gap and the importance of effective training.

Utah Tech University, St. George, Utah (9 participants)

- **Demographics:** Diverse races, LGBTQ+, mix of students and professionals, adults.
- **Technology Usage & Learning:**
    - Google Suite and other tools are commonly used.
    - A significant portion of participants learned tech skills through self-teaching.
- **Communication & Networking:**
    - Various platforms, including ChatGPT and Instagram, were mentioned for communication and client outreach.
- **Generational Differences:**
    - Conversations touched upon shared team notes, past platform experiences, and the introduction of tech tools in schools.
- **Technology Shift due to COVID:**
    - Increased home use of school devices.
- **Underutilized Technology:**
    - Discussions around preferences in communication tools and the role of tech in networking.
- **Training & Skill Acquisition:**
    - Training methods, hands-on experience, and the role of computer literacy were discussed.
- **Miscellaneous Observations:**
    - Concerns about tech accessibility for elderly and the role of tech in special education.
- **Overall:** The conversation centered on technology's role in various sectors, the generational tech gap, and the significance of training.

Tech Moms Focus Group (4 participants)

- **Demographics:** Diverse races, all females, all professionals over 30.
- **Main Points:**
    - Challenges and benefits of using diverse digital platforms.
    - Concerns about discrimination towards older women in tech.
    - The importance of adequate training, effective communication, and employee autonomy.
    - Desire for more representation of women over 50 in tech.
- **Overall:** The discussion highlighted challenges faced by older women in tech, the importance of diverse skill sets, and the role of proper training.

DETAIL:

Cedar City, Southern Utah University, 10 participants
Demographics: Race muliple, LGBTQ+, students and professionals, adults,

Digital Skills & Job Applications:

- Digital skills are assumed during job applications.
- XXX mentioned a generational gap; older generation mostly used Dell, whereas the younger generation used iOS, leading to workflow issues.
- XXX noted that her more tech-savvy generation has an advantage in the workforce.
- XXX said many job listings don't translate well for primarily Spanish speakers; most job vacancies are spread through word of mouth.
- XXX highlighted that post-COVID, the expectation is for homes to be set up as office spaces.

Training & Software:

- XXX described the "Banner" system, used in higher education and HR, as not user-friendly. There's no formal training program for it at SUU.
- XXX and XXX emphasized the importance of leveraging tools like the Google Suite.
- XXX remarked that often there's an assumption that younger employees will handle tech issues, even if it's outside their job description.

Job Skills & Expectations:

- Digital and visual skills are often expected in various job roles, sometimes even outside the designated responsibility like graphic designing.
- XXX mentioned jobs expecting outdated formats without explaining why.
- XXX pointed out that specific training, like in Excel, can be interpreted in multiple ways.
- XXX said older professors teaching courses need to be updated with the latest digital skills and tools.
- XXX suggested giving grants to public universities for software licensing.

Training Needs & University Infrastructure:

- XXX emphasized the effectiveness of group training.
- XXX mentioned the need for a standardized onboarding system.
- XXX complained about unreliable Wi-Fi on the SUU campus, with most resorting to using the "conference" network.
- XXX stressed the importance of formal training for widely used systems like Banner.

This feedback highlights the digital skill gap between generations, the importance of proper training, and the challenges faced by both employees and students in adapting to digital transformations in the workplace and educational institutions.

Utah Tech University, St. George, Utah, 9 participants
Demographics: Race muliple, LGBTQ+, students and professionals, adults,

Technology Usage & Learning:

XXX: Uses Google Suite for communication and sharing documents. Learned mainly by self-teaching. XXX: Works in schools, mainly uses Google Suite, Schoology, and Canva. Learning:

Most learned through self-teaching, with only 20% learned during undergraduate studies. XXX: At the university level, uses TMS, Slack, Google Suite, Neo ed, and Chrome River for travel plans. Mentioned a transition to a different system. XXX: Mentioned a transition. XXX: Acquired computer literacy in high school. Familiar with Adobe Suite, especially InDesign. XXX: Uses phone and square. Prefers not to use a scheduler.

Communication & Networking:
XXX: Uses ChatGPT for PowerPoint and holds online workshops. XXX: Uses Instagram as a platform to reach clients.
Generational Differences: XXX: Discussed team's shared notes list. XXX: Recollected past experiences with platforms like MySpace and Facebook. XXX: Responsible for a website draft. Mentioned disconnect. XXX: Communicates with staff and parents. Uses QR codes for easier access. Mentioned the introduction of translators in the school district.
Technology Shift due to COVID: Schools started allowing students to take devices home.

Underutilized Technology:
XXX: Emphasized the importance of email and chat. XXX: Prefers using either text or slack, not both. XXX: Stressed the importance of using technology for networking and database access. XXX: Mentioned computer literacy classes.

Training & Skill Acquisition:
XXX: Mentioned an online database for training. XXX: Expressed interest in classes and mentioned that her team would sponsor training sessions. XXX: Highlighted the hands-on nature of her industry.

Miscellaneous Observations:
XXX: Raised concerns about the self-checkout aisles and the challenges faced by the elderly. XXX: Discussed the use of iPads for nonverbal training in special education. XXX: Emphasized self-reliance and mentioned cultural aspects.

Overall, the conversation revolved around the use of technology in different sectors, the generational gap in tech usage, the role of training, and some concerns and challenges associated with technology.

Tech Moms Focus Group Summary: 4 participants.
Demographics: Race multiple, Female, all over 3o years old, professional

XXX discussed her experience with WordPress, emphasizing the importance of secure code for contact forms. She highlighted that nobody in the group was using the same digital platform, emphasizing the diversity in platform choices and methods. This led to the challenge of having to self-teach multiple platforms.

XXX expressed her concerns about discrimination, especially towards older women, and how companies are missing out by not tapping into their potential.

XXX believes that age can be an advantage in the tech industry.

XXX stressed the need for businesses to be forward-thinking, emphasizing the importance of adequate training for employees. She also mentioned the extensive use of Google Workspace by the state and SLCC.

XXX recommended platforms like Udemy as excellent resources for learning tech-related skills.

XXX felt the need for hands-on practice, especially with coding. XXX mentioned that having too many tech options can sometimes be overwhelming and confusing.

XXX touched upon the importance of effective internal communication, especially the tone used in emails and the nuances of interpersonal communication.

XXX believes in giving employees enough autonomy, which can foster creativity.

XXX expressed her desire to see more representation of women over 50 in the tech industry.

Public Service Announcement

In May 2023, we were given the opportunity to partner with Comcast to produce a 30 second PSA that advertised the Digital Access Planning activities that were going to be occurring around the State, and to encourage community involvement. Some of the production elements were donated as an in-kind offering to the CEOB, who then wrote, cast, produced, and disseminated the PSA publicly, and to other members of the cohort to promote their own efforts.

Digital Access Survey

In June 2023, we developed a survey for statewide distribution. Please see the full survey results document at the end of this recommendation.

Outreach/Coalition Building

The bulk of our effort has gone into meetings, community outreach, and coalition building ahead of a formal agreement with the State to organize and build a coalition that will house the

statewide asset map, and coordinate efforts to build the capacity of local groups ahead of anticipated federal funds.