



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



Washington State
Department of
Commerce

Digital Equity Funding Opportunity Guidance

By Sabrina Roach and Dharma Dailey, May 21, 2023

How to use this document: Please refer to this guidance while working through worksheet #17 *Potential Paths Forward for Digital Equity, section 17.1*

Contents:

- [Introduction](#)
- [General Strategies for Seeking Funding](#)
- [Federal Funding Opportunities](#)
- [WA State Funding Opportunities](#)

Introduction: The Digital Equity Funding Gap Reality

The [IIJA](#) includes roughly \$26 million for digital equity spread out over five years in Washington State (IIJA Digital Equity Competitive Grants). As of May, 2023, we do not yet know how it will be distributed.

Our state needs at least roughly \$60 million each year for several years to make a dent in our digital inequities. This level of resources is unlikely to happen without informed advocacy from those who are shepherding digital equity in their communities. Below we offer some strategies to help BATs/Tribes build the capacity that is needed in your individual communities, across the state, and as a field.

The following are general strategies for developing relationships with donors and grant partners emphasizing the importance of ongoing relationships that help to build the digital equity field.

General Strategies For Seeking Funding

Help Build a Field of Invested Digital Equity Funders

Digital Equity is a developing and evolving field. There are not many funders in this work at this time. Therefore, there is much work to do to educate funders about digital equity and to build relationships and enthusiasm for this emerging issue. As with any kind of long-term work, we encourage you to build relationships with potential and existing funders that enable the kind of co-learning and shared strategic thinking that are the precursors to resourcing the work to the level that can actually bridge the digital divide.

Highlight Funders Who Are Working on Digital Equity

First, identify and recognize funders who are already invested in digital equity. Those already on board for this issue can help build consensus and create momentum in your community by, for example, participating in public forums. Funders who truly get the issue can also help to influence other funders not yet on board. Even if a funder who cares about digital equity does not have a direct funding opportunity for you, they may be helpful resources for helping you to identify and strategize about approaching other funders and resourcing opportunities.

Educate Funders about Digital Equity

Since Digital Equity is an emerging and evolving issue, many funders may have misconceptions or little knowledge about the current state of affairs. Even funders who follow or support the issue may not know the specifics for your community. Consider setting up a funder briefing to share what you know about digital equity. This could be as simple as an informal meeting where you share your assessment of current needs, challenges, and opportunities. Funder briefings are opportunities to establish a two-way dialogue in which the funder can express how they might want to be involved in digital equity. They are less an opportunity to push a hard sell for your project or to get a check at the end of the meeting than they are to open channels for high level strategic thinking about how to move digital equity forward. Developing such a relationship with even one funder can help to improve awareness and enthusiasm for digital equity among a broader community of funders.

Invite Funders to Participate in Your Work

Most funders invest heavily on research and evaluation that helps them to set their funding priorities and guidelines and to evaluate their funding programs. Funding organizations are typically staffed with people who are both consumers and producers of state-of-the-field analysis— only a portion of which is typically available as public knowledge. They may have dedicated staff who are very familiar with the issue you are working on and/or the population you are working with. You can tap into this deep pool of expert knowledge to help develop your own work by asking funders to participate in your work. For example, a funder might sit on a steering or advisory committee for your organization. They may staff a key event, facilitate a

strategy meeting, or make an introduction to a potential collaborator. You might request a briefing from them on a topic they are knowledgeable about.

Schedule Briefings with Government Representatives and Agencies

Digital equity is a problem that cannot be solved without a strategic alignment of approaches across government representatives and agencies. To influence the next round of potential funding opportunities and government-influenced strategies, you will want to schedule Local Elected Briefings about your draft digital equity plan that enable your state, county, and municipal representatives to review and discuss your draft of this plan. The ideal timing for this initial discussion of your plan with these key stakeholders will be before the end of August and mid-September latest. Bring an estimate of how much this work you envision is involved and the cost. Discuss which budgets could be a good fit for various aspects of the work. Continue to send them and their staff updates as your work advances.

Agency Decision Packages for the Governor's Office Budget Development Process

The Governor's Office releases their budget in mid-December. State agencies develop their Decision Packages and submit them by early fall.

Broadband Action Teams and Tribes have an opportunity to make their priorities known during the summer to agencies while they are finalizing their Decision Packages.

It might be useful to work in collaboration with your local government lobbyists.

Braid Funding Across Multiple Funders

As digital equity impacts most of our society, do not limit your budget priorities to the Broadband Office in the Washington Department of Commerce. Instead consider a strategy that braids funding together from multiple sources.

- Tribal or Local Government
- Federal Programs
- Community Foundations
- Health Foundations
- Ports with Community Grant Programs
- Corporations
- Regulated Banks Participating in the [Community Reinvestment Act](#)

Funding Opportunities

We've curated a range of possible funding opportunities for you to explore from the federal to the local level.

FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Compilations of funding federal sources are particularly useful for digital equity are the BroadbandUSA's Federal Funding List and The Federal Communications Commission's Broadband Funding Map.

BroadbandUSA's Federal Funding List The [BroadbandUSA Federal Funding List](#) offers two search functions that help you to find relevant opportunities ("Agency/Department" and "Eligible Recipients").

- **The Federal Communications Commission's Broadband Funding Map** The FCC's [Broadband Funding Map](#) is not as comprehensive as the BroadbandUSA list, but enables you to see funding opportunities by location).

Examples of the kinds of programs you will find include:

- Offers Broadband Funding Summaries
- Federal Communications Commission
- [Connect America Fund Phase II](#)
- [Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#)
- NTIA
- [Broadband Infrastructure Program](#)
- [Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program NOFO 1](#)
- Rural Utilities Service
- [Community Connect Grant Program](#)
- [Rural eConnectivity Program](#)
- [Telephone Loan Program](#)
- US Department of Treasury
- [Capital Projects Fund](#)
- HUD Block Grants

Less Familiar Federal Funding Opportunities

Those involved in broadband development are likely aware of federal funding opportunities from NTIA and the Department of Agriculture. However, several federal agencies have funding opportunities that could potentially support digital equity initiatives.

The federal government has allowed use of [TANF](#), [SNAP](#) Employment and Training Fund, and Workforce Development Funds ([WIOA](#)) to support digital inclusion [as explained in this article](#)

[by the National Skills Coalition](#) as part of Covid-19 response. Some of these initiatives are evolving and will remain in place in some form and could help shape future digital inclusion efforts.

Community Reinvestment Act Funding (CRA)

Under the federal Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), all banking institutions that receive Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Insurance (FDIC) have increasing obligations to invest in community development for those living in “low and moderate income” (LMI) communities in their service region.

WASHINGTON STATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- [Washington State Broadband Office](#) - Infrastructure Acceleration Grants - ARPA SLFRF, State Broadband Matching Grants, Rapid Design Studies, and Grant Writing Services.
- [Public Works Board](#) – State Broadband Infrastructure Funding
- [Community Economic Revitalization Board \(CERB\)](#) – Rural Broadband Construction and Planning Funding

LOCAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Local Community and Economic Development Funding

Many community institutions provide community investment and economic development funding. For example, the [Port of Vancouver, Washington](#) gives away grants in the range of \$10,000 and [Port of Tacoma](#) gives away \$250,000 annually.

Community Foundations in Washington

Digital Equity is in alignment with the missions of the following area foundations. Check their sites for application opportunities and to organize annual funder briefings.

- [Bainbridge Community Foundation](#)
- [Blue Mountain Community Foundation](#)
- [Community Foundation for Southwest Washington](#)
- [Community Foundation of North Central Washington](#)
- [Community Foundation of Snohomish County](#)
- [The Community Foundation of South Puget Sound](#)
- [Greater Tacoma Community Foundation](#)
- [Innovia Foundation](#)
- [Jefferson Community Foundation](#)
- [Kent Community Foundation](#)

- [Kitsap Community Foundation](#)
- [Latino Community Fund of Washington State](#)
- [Potlatch Fund](#)
- [Pride Foundation](#)
- [Renton Regional Community Foundation](#)
- [San Juan Island Community Foundation](#)
- [Seattle Foundation](#)
- [Skagit Community Foundation](#)
- [Three Rivers Community Foundation](#)
- [Whatcom Community Foundation](#)
- [Whidbey Community Foundation](#)
- [Yakima Valley Community Foundation](#)

List provided by [Philanthropy Northwest](#).

MUNICIPAL AND COUNTY FRANCHISE FEES

Digital Equity Grants can be funded by Cable Franchise Fees which are negotiated between cable providers and municipalities and counties for public right-of-ways. Municipalities and counties have great latitude in what they choose to ask for in cable franchise agreements. One example of a municipality using the funding for digital equity is the City of Seattle which uses part of their fees to [fund digital equity work](#) and also negotiated [free internet for nonprofits](#) that provide technology services to under-resourced individuals in the city.

CORPORATE INVESTMENTS

Examples of Corporate Programs include the following:

- [Tyson invests in digital skills.](#)
- [Comcast funds local Digital Navigator programs](#) and [research](#)
- [AT&T Foundation funds Believe Seattle](#)
- [Avista Foundation](#) has a track record of funding community internet access.

AN EXAMPLE OF GRASSROOTS RESOURCING

A Faith-Based Local Initiative Becomes a Model for Other Local Communities

As stated above, since digital equity is an emerging field, standing funding sources and other resources are not always available in a fit-for-purpose form to meet community needs. In this section, we give a few examples of how grassroots organizations have met emerging digital equity needs in their communities. In many cases, local community members are the ones who will spot emerging digital equity needs, and, in many cases, can more responsively and quickly address those needs than can be accomplished by large block granting which evolves rather

slowly and takes considerable time and effort to attain. Thus, while it is prudent to seek external resources, it is also prudent to consider how digital equity gaps may be addressed at the local level. We offer this example from a faith-based group in Michigan who identified an emerging digital equity need, found the resources locally, then shared their model with other communities who made their own similar initiatives to address the same need in their own communities.

"Connect the Camps - Washtenaw Solidarity with Farmworkers Fundraiser"

Working in partnership with the Southeast Michigan Migrant Resource Council, Washtenaw Solidarity with Farmworkers' fundraised to install Internet infrastructure at three migrant camps and to pay the monthly costs of internet services at five migrant camps. They then toured the state presenting their model to other groups.

Broadband Infrastructure Funding

For a full list of current federal and state infrastructure funding opportunities, you can view this sheet [HERE](#).