Maine Digital Equity and Inclusion Asset Inventory

Prepared for the Maine Connectivity Authority and Digital Equity Task Force

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE
Center on Aging

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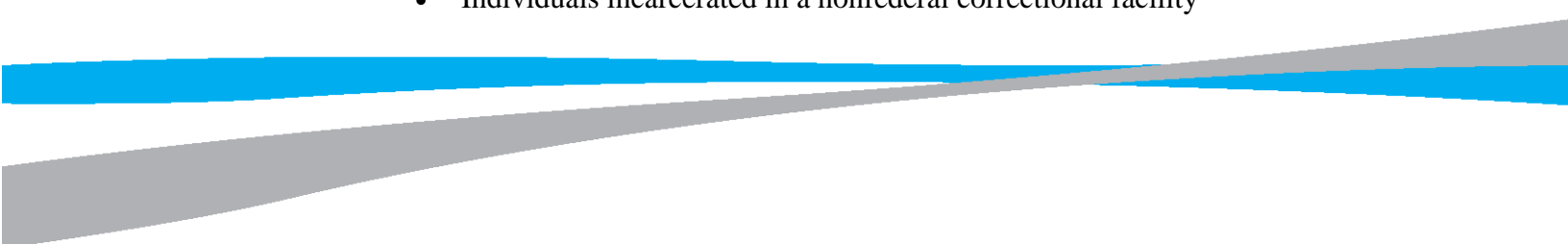
INTRODUCTION

Maine Connectivity Authority partnered with the University of Maine Center on Aging to undertake a comprehensive inventory of assets in the state of Maine on the topic of digital equity and inclusion. The following report presents a summary of the key elements of Maine's digital equity and inclusion ecosystem in terms of the key networks and individual organizations which are meeting the needs of Mainers.

The operating definition of digital equity and inclusion used for the asset inventory is from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance and includes:

- Affordable, robust broadband internet service
- Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user
- Access to digital literacy training
- Quality technical support
- Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration

The asset inventory considers the needs of all Mainers, but has a particular focus on "covered populations" identified in the Digital Equity Act of 2021. These populations include the following:

- Individuals living in households with incomes at or below 150% of the poverty line
- Individuals 60 years of age or older
- Veterans
- Individuals living with one or more disabilities
- Individuals with barriers to the English language (including English language learners and those with low literacy)
- Members of racial and ethnic minority groups
- Individuals residing in rural areas
- Individuals incarcerated in a nonfederal correctional facility

If your organization provides a digital equity and inclusion-related service that is not listed in this report, you can visit the Maine Connectivity Authority website to submit information about your asset. Additionally, the Maine Connectivity Authority has an online asset listing that provides more detailed information about such resources. For assets where there are large numbers of individual organizations such as Maine libraries, this report will discuss their overall role in the ecosystem, but detailed information about specific libraries who have participated in the asset inventory will be available at the Maine Connectivity Authority website.

METHODOLOGY

The asset inventory utilized three primary methods to identify digital equity and inclusion resources: 1) a review of online resources to identify information about assets; 2) key informant interviews with individuals situated within organizations that have a major role in digital equity or are knowledgeable about the landscape of resources; 3) surveys with large networks of organizations providing digital equity and inclusion resources, including adult education programs, libraries, and housing authorities. There were 28 individuals who participated in key informant interviews and information was collected on 93 assets via the survey.

AFFORDABILITY PROGRAMS

The two most prevalent affordability programs for devices and internet access are the Lifeline and Affordable Connectivity Programs.

LIFELINE

Lifeline is a subsidy program for up to $9.25 per month for phone, internet, or bundled services. Lifeline is open to consumers who have household incomes that are 135% or less than the Federal Poverty Guidelines or if a household member participates in any of these programs: SNAP, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, or the Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit. For individuals living on tribal lands, there are additional benefit programs that assist with eligibility. Households on tribal lands also have access to an expanded benefit, being able to receive a discount of up to $34.25 per month, and up to a $100 reduction in connection charges. Once qualified, Lifeline is accessed through phone or internet companies that offer Lifeline benefits.

Website: https://www.lifelinesupport.org/get-started/

AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

The Affordable Connectivity Program through the Federal Communications Commission provides financial assistance for households to access broadband internet. A secondary component is a one-time discount to purchase a desktop, laptop or tablet if a person contributes between $10 and $50 to the cost. Benefits are accessed through telecommunications providers and not all providers offer the Affordable Connectivity Program.

The Affordable Connectivity Program is open to households who have an income of 200% or less of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. It is also open to households that have a member who accesses any of the following programs:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Medicaid
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
- Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit
- Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program,
- Federal Pell Grant (received in current award year)

Tribal members involved in certain additional programs are also eligible. Tribal members are eligible for a larger potential benefit (up to $75 per month).

Website: https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov/

STATEWIDE ORGANIZATIONS

ASSOCIATES FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Associates for Training and Development offers Maine's Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), a job training program for older adults authorized through the Older Americans Act. The organization offers The Learn IT 2 Work program, which provides computer skills training topics ranging from understanding computer hardware, to web browsing, and email. Learn IT 2 Work is delivered over the course of 20 hours in four to five days. The service is not free and has a $750 tuition requirement.

Website: https://a4td.org/learn-it-2-work/

DISABILITY RIGHTS MAINE

Disability Rights Maine is the designated Protection & Advocacy agency for people with disabilities in the state of Maine. The intersection of its mission with the issue of digital equity and inclusion became particularly important during the pandemic, when it was necessary to provide individualized education in a remote world. Because of the needs of some students with disabilities, remote learning was difficult and there was sometimes a conflict between school closures and the needs of the child which are governed by their Individualized Education Plan. Disability Rights Maine advocated for students in receiving individual services appropriate to their needs. Disability Rights Maine also has a particular focus on advocating for individuals with disabilities needing assistive technology and ensuring communication access for Mainers who are deaf, deaf blind, or hard of hearing. In the area of health equity, this could take the form of ensuring providers use telehealth with captioning, and providing training on MaineRelay Services.

Covered populations of focus: People with disabilities

Website: https://drme.org/

EVERNORTH

Evernorth "provides low- and moderate-income people of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont with affordable housing and community investments." Evernorth has a Digital Services initiative that has piloted free wifi services for residents within its developments.

Website: https://evernorthus.org/evernorth-connections/digital-services/

GIVE IT. GET IT.

give IT. get IT. provides low-cost and high-quality computers to individuals and families along with IT needs and goals assessment, and training and technical support. Eligibility for individuals and families is based on income and goals. The program is supported by a secure and sustainable electronics recycling arm of the organization.

Individuals seeking services from give IT. get IT. can connect with an expert staff member by phone to help assess the individuals' program eligibility, IT needs, and goals driving their need for personal computers, internet, training, and support. Staff provide easily accessible and impartial guidance to clients to help

overcome the significant barriers clients experience when faced with the many equipment, internet, support, and training options available to them.

Based on conversations with give IT. get IT. staff, clients are provided recommendations on an internet provider in their area based on cost, speed and reliability if needed; a computing device that best suits their goals (new or refurbished, with a 2+ year plan); initial support and training needs such as their computer literacy level; and additional 'outside' resources available that would support their objectives such as work ready, other training, small business startup, and disability and employment programs.

give IT. get IT. has established referral relationships with organizations throughout Maine, allowing these organizations to readily connect their clients with give IT. get IT supports. These organizations include:

- Eastern Maine Development Corporation
- Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE)
- FedCap Bangor
- Maine Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Good Shepherd Food Bank
- Kennebec Valley Community College
- National Digital Equity Center
- Maine Prison Re-Entry Network
- ASPIRE
- Community Choice Behavioral Health
- MSW Health Affiliates of Maine
- Worthington Foundation
- Four Directions Development Corporation
- Community Concepts

- Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Literacy Volunteers of Franklin and Somerset Counties
- Destination Occupation
- The Housing Authority of the City of Old Town
- Health Affiliates Maine
- Woodfords Family Services

- Partners for Peace
- One Community Many Voices

- Downeast Community Partners
- Opportunity Alliance

- Center for Grieving Children

- Lewiston Homeward Bound
- Augusta Career Center

Website: https://www.giveitgetit.org/

IN HER PRESENCE

In Her Presence is led by immigrant women in Maine and "strive[s] to bring together immigrant women from across communities and generations to ensure that Maine's economic agenda includes the aspirations and needs of immigrant women." In Her Presence has provided laptops, tablets, and data plans to Maine immigrant women to meet their needs for internet access.

Covered populations of focus: Immigrants and refugees

Website: https://inherpresence.org/program/meet-your-needs/

THE IRIS NETWORK

The Iris Network's mission is to help "people with vision impairment or blindness attain independence and community integration." The Iris Network's Rehabilitation Center helps individuals with vision impairments develop vocational and independent living skills. Clients of the Rehabilitation Center are able to access support from Assistive Technology Specialists in learning to utilize adaptive equipment.

The Iris Network also maintains a Low Vision Center which provides guidance on assistive technology devices and the opportunity to purchase these devices, which include desktop computer video magnifiers, and Alexa devices.

Covered populations of focus: People with disabilities

Website (general): https://www.theiris.org/

JOBS FOR MAINE GRADUATES

Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG) works with the public education system in Maine from middle school through higher education. "JMG programs are hosted within Maine's public schools, and classes and year-round activities are led by JMG Specialists who serve as mentors and educators. Specialists are able to develop student-centered, personalized education plans delivered through a competency-based curriculum focusing on academic knowledge, career development skills, leadership, and teamwork."

In the digital equity arena, JMG has utilized a donation program through AT&T to provide devices for students. In 2022, JMG provided 150 laptops and 41 Chromebooks for students or groups of students who have a need identified by JMG specialists. JMG has also paid for some or all of the cost of 18 additional computers for students through the Opportunity Passport program, which provides

financial education to Maine youth who have been in foster care, while also providing dollar for dollar matching up to $1,000 for certain purchases.

Website: https://jmg.org/

MAINE BROADBAND COALITION

The Maine Broadband Coalition is "the hub of information, policy support, and capacity building around broadband/high speed internet in Maine" that has a membership of hundreds of organizations and dozens of Maine communities.

Initiatives of the Maine Broadband Coalition include speed testing, allowing households to understand their internet speed, while also generating more accurate maps of broadband speed to identify service gaps. The Coalition also maintains a listing of municipal and regional broadband initiatives.

Maine Broadband Coalition is investing in regional capacity building in the broadband arena through three initiatives: Community of Practice, Connectivity Boosters, and County Connectors. Community of Practice provides an opportunity for shared learning, resource sharing, and technical assistance among broadband stakeholders working on regional initiatives. The Connectivity Boosters program is a capacity building support for the Communities of Practice in the form of administrative support for regional broadband initiatives. The County Connector program utilizes Connectors to build local networks and conduct outreach on the issue of broadband expansion.

Maine Broadband Coalition is also a convener for broadband issues and has held annual Maine Broadband Summits bringing together broadband stakeholders.

Website: https://www.mainebroadbandcoalition.org/

MAINE BUREAU OF VETERANS' SERVICES

Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services provides information and referral to Maine Veterans about the benefits, services, and programs available to them and advocates for their needs. During the pandemic, the Bureau worked to allow Maine Veterans to meet remotely with Veteran Service Officers, lowering the barriers to access to this service.

Covered populations of focus: Veterans

Website: https://www.maine.gov/veterans/

MAINECITE

The MaineCITE (Community Inclusion Through Technology) program is "designed to help make assistive technology more available to Maine children, adults and seniors who need them."

MaineCITE's digital equity and inclusion work includes capacity building among service providers to help them understand and meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Activities include webinars on creating accessible content that is offered quarterly and by request to different organizations. The webinars provide information on how to create accessible websites, and the importance of doing this to make web use easier for people with disabilities along with all users. The organization plans to start preparing regular newsletters and information briefs and revamping its Facebook page to include quick tips on accessibility.

Direct service activities facilitated by MaineCITE include working with four partners to do assistive technology demonstrations and loans. Individuals who need assistive technology can borrow devices for thirty days and try them before buying. Examples of digital technology include screen readers, braille notetakers, keyboards and mice, and tablets. The four partners MaineCITE engages are Spurwink Alltech (demonstrations and equipment loans), Pine Tree Society (demonstrations and equipment loans, assistive technology assessments), Gallant Therapy Services, and the University of Maine at Farmington (equipment loan library).

Recognizing the need for more accessibility to rural areas in Maine, MaineCITE is looking to establish a mobile assistive technology lab that can conduct trips to rural areas regularly to provide training and equipment loans for people who cannot access physical locations.

Covered populations of focus: People with disabilities

Website: https://mainecite.org/

MAINE CONNECTIVITY AUTHORITY

Mane Connectivity Authority is a quasi-governmental agency established in 2021, "charged with achieving the universal access of affordable high-speed broadband in Maine." Maine Connectivity Authority's strategic objectives include: 1) Optimize broadband deployment - Decrease barriers to deliver broadband; 2) Reach the last mile - Make quality broadband available to all; and 3) Advance

digital equity for all - ensure that all Mainers, especially the most disadvantaged, have access to and are able to use information and communications technologies.

As of Fall 2022, funding directed through Maine Connectivity Authority is being used for the following purposes:

1) "Partnerships and collaborative efforts to design, fund, and build broadband infrastructure projects in eligible areas." (Connect the Ready Grants)

2) "Community broadband planning at a regional scale through tailored technical assistance and the coordination of multiple professional service providers to support participants." (Get Ready: Community Support Program)

3) "Deploy, sustain and maximize the benefits of broadband infrastructure investment in all state regions. Each partner will build and lead digital inclusion efforts in each region and tribe while also providing support for community and regional-scale broadband infrastructure solutions and investments." (Regional & Tribal Broadband Partners Program)

4) "Optimize broadband deployment by incentivizing internet service providers (ISPs) to complete their existing networks by extending service to all unserved locations in their service areas." (Reach Me Line Extension Incentives)

5) "Develop new strategic routes and acquire access to middle-mile fiber infrastructure to enable last-mile broadband networks." (Enable Middle-Mile Partnerships)
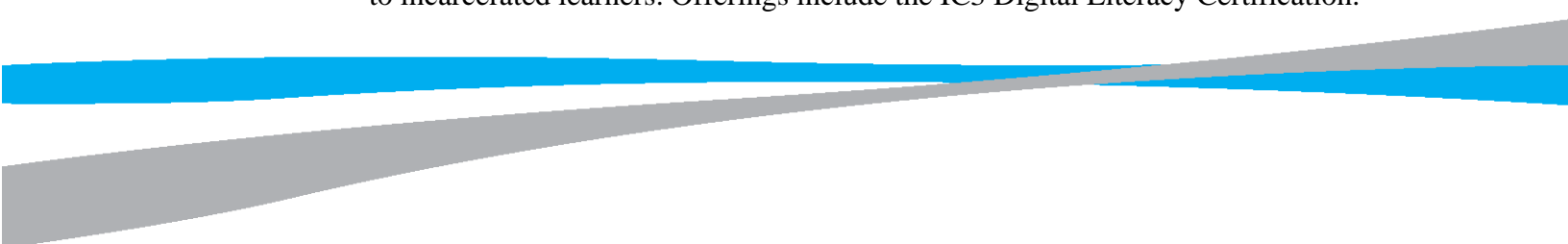
Digital equity support through MCA includes facilitation of Maine's Digital Equity Plan, promoting affordability resources, promoting broadband integration into other pressing community issues, and "expanding digital equity within healthcare, education, and economic development through investments in community hubs and affordable device or device lending programs."

Finally, MCA helps to strengthen data about broadband availability (Correct the Dots! and Broadband Intelligence Platform) and efforts to support middle and last mile infrastructure (Jumpstart Connectivity Initiative and Maine Online Optical Statewide Enabling Network).

Website: https://www.maineconnectivity.org/

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The Maine Department of Corrections oversees adult and juvenile correctional facilities in the state of Maine. The Department offers educational programming to incarcerated learners. Offerings include the IC3 Digital Literacy Certification.

In the past, the Department has collaborated with a company to provide tablets that provide educational, job training, and rehabilitative programming.

Covered populations of focus: Incarcerated individuals

Website: https://www.maine.gov/corrections/programs/education

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Maine's Department of Education (DoE) administers the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI) which provides device access for Maine's public school students. DoE has recently launched the Maine Learning Technology Initiative 2.0 which has expanded beyond device access to also focus on access to applications and learning tools. Key elements of MLTI 2.0 include provision of personal computing devices for students in grades 7 and 8, as well as providing assistance to teachers on integrating technology to support student learning and assistance to schools in evaluating their technology infrastructure.

Maine's public schools have access to broadband internet through the Maine School Library Network. Recognizing the potential inequities in access outside of school, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, mobile hotspots were made available to schools to provide to students with connectivity challenges. Individual schools now own these hotspots, while paying for the internet service.

Website (Maine Learning Technology Initiative 2.0): https://www.maine.gov/doe/index.php/Learning/LTT/MLTI/2.0

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Maine DHHS provides information about Lifeline to the public, as well as programs related to its mission including MaineCITE.

Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Family Independence administers a digital equity-related program called Higher Opportunities for Pathways to Employment, which helps "Maine families pursue training and education beyond high school and achieve their career plans by addressing barriers to success." The program is available to individuals who meet a variety of qualifications including being a parent or caretaker, having financial need, and being enrolled in an academic program. The program funds $50 a month for internet service and up to $500 for computers and technology.

Website (HOPE program): https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofi/programs-services/hope

MAINE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL

The Maine Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC) "is a partnership of people with disabilities, their families, and agencies which identifies barriers to community inclusion, self-determination, and independence. The Council acts to effect positive change through advocacy, training, demonstration projects, and support for other inclusive and collaborative systemic change activities."

In the digital equity arena, MDDC bought 147 new iPads for distribution to individuals with developmental disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in partnership with the Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies and Spurwink Services. Outreach to potential applicants with developmental disabilities was carried out through case managers, service providers, and parent and self-advocacy organizations and over 450 requests were received. MDDC currently partners with the National Digital Equity Center to provide device access and training for individuals in rural areas with developmental disabilities.

At a policy level, MDDC tracks and comments on legislation impacting individuals in Maine with intellectual or developmental disabilities, such as recently working to get assistive technology for the intellectual or developmental disabilities population to be accessible through Waiver funding (a mechanism for operating programs through special permission of the federal funder).

Covered populations of focus: Individuals with disabilities

Website: https://www.maineddc.org/

MAINE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS COALITION

Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition (MIRC) has the mission "to improve the legal, social and economic conditions experienced by Maine's immigrants – enhancing their lives while strengthening Maine – through advocacy, information sharing and collaboration both through and among our member organizations."

In the digital equity arena, MIRC has been working with community organizations to publish a digital equity plan that will be sent to a legislative committee to inform them of needs in the community related to digital equity.

The organization has also been involved in collaborative efforts to increase device access and support for immigrants. Goodwill has been a device donating partner

that refurbishes and donates or sells affordable devices. The application for this program has been translated and made available to MIRC partner organizations. MIRC also partners with Hope Acts to allow asylum seekers to remotely access asylum hearings through WebEx (which used to require trips to Boston). Catholic Charities has partnered to offer technology workshops for immigrants.

Covered populations supported: Immigrants and refugees

Website: https://maineimmigrantrights.org/

MAINE PHILANTHROPY CENTER

Maine Philanthropy Center "is an association of grant makers with the mission to provide opportunity, leadership, and support to advance the effectiveness of philanthropy in Maine."

Maine Philanthropy Center has engaged in donor education on the topic of broadband and digital equity and inclusion. Education has involved highlighting research on broadband and highlighting issue experts to inform collective or aligned funding strategies. Maine Philanthropy Coalition has also worked with Maine Broadband Coalition to do a Broadband 101 course.

Website: https://www.mainephilanthropy.org/

NATIONAL DIGITAL EQUITY CENTER

With a mission "to close the digital divide across the United States," the National Digital Equity Center (NDEC) provides a range of services nationally and in Maine supporting digital equity and inclusion.

NDEC offers over 40 classes that fall into the categories of "For Work & Business," "For Home & Education," and "Aging Well With Technology." Classes are free to Maine residents and typically include 5-10 participants in one to three one-hour sessions.

NDEC also offers in-person classes in partnership with 50 libraries, adult education programs, and community centers across Maine. Partners are trained as "facilitators" to offer on-site classes. The following is a list of on-site class partners as of December 2022.

- Alfond Center for Health (Augusta)

- Alice L. Pendleton Library (Islesboro)

- BAE - Comfort Inn (Biddeford)

- Bass Harbor Memorial Library (Bernard)

- Biddeford Adult Education (Biddeford)

- Bowdoinham Public Library (Bowdoinham)

- Bridgton Public Library (Bridgton)

- Brooksville Free Public Library (Brooksville)

- Caribou Public Library (Caribou)

- CCFC - MSAD 44 Adult Education (Bethel)

- Curtis Memorial Library (Brunswick)

- Deer Isle Adult and Community Education (Deer Isle)

- Downeast Correctional Facility (Machiasport)

- MSAD 54 Skowhegan Adult Education (Skowhegan)

- Mt. Desert Island Adult Education (Bar Harbor)

- New Beginnings, Inc. (Lewiston)

- Patten Free Library (Bath)

- Rockland Public Library (Rockland)

- RSU #3 Adult and Community Education (Thorndike)

- RSU 19 Adult Education (Newport)

- RSU 24 Adult Education (Sullivan)

- SAD 1 Adult Education (Presque Isle)

- Sanford Community Adult Education (Sanford)

- Scarborough Public Library (Scarborough)

- SeniorsPlus – Lewiston (Lewiston)

- Skowhegan Free Public Library (Skowhegan)

- Falmouth Memorial Library (Falmouth)
- Gibbs Library (Washington)
- Gray-New Gloucester Adult Education (Gray)
- Henry D. Moore Library (Steuben)
- Intercultural Community Center (Westbrook)
- Jesup Memorial Library (Bar Harbor)
- Kittery Adult Education (Kittery)
- Lubec Community Outreach Center (Lubec)
- Marshwood Adult and Community Education (South Berwick)
- Massabesic Center for Adult Learning (Waterboro)
- Millinocket Memorial Library (Millinocket)
- MSAD 24 Van Buren (Van Buren)

- Southwest Harbor Public Library (Southwest Harbor)
- Springvale Career Center (Springvale)
- Town of Searsport (Searsport)
- Two Bridges Regional Jail (Wiscasset)
- Vassalboro Public Library (Vassalboro)
- Veterans Upward Bound Office (Portland)
- Veterans' Memorial Library (Patten)
- VOANNE - Arthur B. Huot House (Saco)
- VOANNE - Veterans Career House (Biddeford)
- Waldo County YMCA (Belfast)
- Walker Memorial Library (Westbrook)
- York Adult Education (York)

NDEC has a current focus on the Digital Navigator concept. This position works to assess skill levels, learner goals, available devices, and available broadband connection for individuals. NDEC has received funding from the National Digital Inclusion Alliance for two Navigators in Washington County that will be serving older adults and tribal communities. They work with the Adult Education program in Washington County. If scaled up, the Navigator concept has the potential to expand in-person classes across the state. Currently, the facilitator/organization can go into an online portal and request a class at their location. With the Digital Navigator model, the Navigator could be a facilitator for organizations that don't have the resources to do this.

Pre-pandemic, NDEC had onsite instructors who would utilize mobile labs to travel from site to site, such as libraries or adult education providers, to conduct classes. This delivery model ended because of the pandemic, and NDEC has moved to an online interactive platform.

During the pandemic, NDEC was able to use foundation funding to purchase a hundred tablets which were made available to older adults 70+ who didn't have a device or internet connection. A half million dollars from the Maine Office of Community Development has been used to fund the program moving forward. This program includes one-on-one technical assistance.

Website: https://digitalequitycenter.org/

NORTHEAST TELEHEALTH RESOURCE CENTER

The Northeast Telehealth Resource Center (NETRC) "has a mission to increase access to quality health care services for rural and medically underserved populations through Telehealth." The Center is one of 14 Telehealth Resource Centers nationally that provides technical assistance to individuals and organizations on activities including telehealth needs assessments, program design, evaluation, reimbursement, and legal and licensing considerations.

Website: https://www.netrc.org/

PHILANTHROPY

The state of Maine has both local and national philanthropic organizations which have funded efforts related to broadband expansion and digital equity.

AT&T Foundation

The AT&T Foundation has provided funding to Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG) to provide technology to students participating in JMG programming.

Maine Community Foundation

As part of Maine Community Foundation's Entrepreneurs and Innovators strategic focus area, the Foundation offered three years of funding to support broadband planning efforts through its Community Broadband program. Funding was also offered for technology and internet connectivity through its COVID-19 grants, and through several grants through the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Fund.

Elmina B. Sewall Foundation

The Foundation has supported broadband efforts, including the Wabanaki Tribal Broadband Project through Four Directions Development Corporation and Broadband Boot Camps in Washington County.

John T. Gorman Foundation

The John T. Gorman Foundation was the initial funder of the Axiom Education and Technology Center (now National Digital Equity Center) to launch their Digital Inclusion Initiative.

Bangor Savings Bank Foundation

The Bangor Savings Bank Foundation has provided funding for digital equity projects, including devices, hotspots, and connectivity for students to learn remotely during the pandemic.

Unity Foundation

Unity Foundation previously funded educational and outreach efforts and device access in conjunction with broadband expansion efforts undertaken by the telecommunications company UniTel.

Betterment Fund

The Betterment Fund has supported broadband assessment, planning, and implementation efforts in rural Maine.

Machias Savings Bank

Machias Savings Bank has a strategic focus on building thriving communities and sees broadband as an element of this. Machias Savings Bank has helped to fund efforts that include elements of digital equity such as Native Entrepreneurship Centers through Maine's Wabanaki tribes, as well as the MaineStreet Business Building in Machias that will provide infrastructure for entrepreneurs in Downeast Maine.

Spectrum

Spectrum has provided funding support for the National Digital Equity Center to provide services to disadvantaged seniors in rural areas.

SPURWINK ALLTECH

Spurwink Alltech's mission is to "provide technology solutions for the educational, communication, daily living and workplace challenges experienced by people of all ages and abilities." Alltech provides services that include assistive technology-related consultation, assessment, and technical assistance. It is one of the technology loan partners with MaineCITE.

Covered populations of focus: People with disabilities

Website: https://spurwinkalltech.org/

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

The Veterans Health Administration provides healthcare services to Maine veterans through a network consisting of Togus VA Medical Center, community-based outpatient clinics, and Vet Centers. The Veterans Health Administration has a variety of digital equity programs that assist veterans with accessing healthcare.

Through a "Digital Divide Consult" the Veterans Health Administration will refer veterans to a VA social worker who can assist with evaluating device and connectivity and determining eligibility for programs that can help. The VA is also able to offer internet-connected tablets for the purposes of healthcare visits. Certain providers will also waive data charges for users of the VA Video Connect application (used to interface with VA providers).

Covered populations of focus: Veterans

Website: https://telehealth.va.gov/digital-divide

REGIONAL/LOCAL RESOURCES

ADULT EDUCATION

Maine has approximately 70 adult education programs that are organized into nine "hubs." These programs provide a variety of services that facilitate a pathway for adults in the state to attain employment or access post-secondary education. Digital literacy is the primary digital equity and inclusion focus of adult education programs.

At intake, students are assessed for their digital literacy ability and needs, as well as their access to computing devices. Programs use the Northstar Digital Literacy package as an entry level program for assessing and developing digital literacy or

the IC3 Digital Literacy Certification, which has beginning, intermediate, and advanced components. This is an industry recognized credential that can potentially qualify for college credit.

Adult education programs use collaborative approaches to student learning and some have developed partnerships with the National Digital Equity Center to access their curriculum. Adult education programs have also received ARPA funding which has gone towards the purchase of loanable devices as well as funding several new positions called Career Success Coordinators at seven college campuses and Four Career Success Navigators who in addition to other duties, will address digital equity needs. Adult education programs also work closely with libraries, in some cases offering to have staff meet students at these locations where they can use library devices. Adult Education's Work Ready program has also worked with give IT. get IT. in the past to secure computers for participants.

The following are examples of some of the approaches taken by individual adult education programs.

Androscoggin County

Lewiston Adult Education

Provides device access (desktops, laptops). Digital literacy curricula provided include Applied Digital Skills (Google), Northstar, and commonsense.org. Specific classes include: 1. Applied Workforce Technology that combines elements of IC3 digital literacy certification, WorkReady credential and industry skills (data entry, typing, operating systems). 2. Digital Literacy for Work, School, and Life I that focuses on basic computer skills, internet, and email. 3. Digital Literacy for Work, School, and Life II that emphasizes the use of technology for research and navigation through various providers and learner management systems.

RSU 16 Adult Education

Offers digital skills training on topics including computer and hardware basics, finding trusted sources online, internet browsing, job searching, key software packages, operating system basics, and technical certifications. Curricula offered include Applied Digital Skills (Google), GCF Learn Free, Microsoft, Northstar, IBM SkillsBuild, and in-house curricula.

Cumberland County

Offers tablets and a limited number of laptop computers to ELL and HiSET students. Digital skills trainings offered include computer and hardware basics, video conferencing, and social media. Curricula offered include Tech Boomers.

Franklin County

Franklin County Adult and Community Education

Has weekly time slots to access one-on-one sessions with their technology coordinator. The organization is partnering with the regional workforce development agency to bring computer classes to the entire county, as well as facilitating device access. The organization is also working with partners to register individuals for low-cost internet service.

Spruce Mountain Adult & Community Education

Provides laptop and high-speed internet for enrollees. Students are also referred to the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program and assisted with applying. To help reduce travel barriers for students, the instructor will teach throughout the organization's service area. Digital literacy training offered includes an array of topics: computer and hardware basics, video calls, internet browsing, operating system basics, social media and more.

Hancock County

Mt Desert Island Adult and Community Education

Provides device access (laptops). Digital skills training includes computer and hardware basics, video calls, finding trusted sources online, internet browsing, key software packages, operating system basics, security, and social media. Curricula offered include National Digital Equity Center and Tech Boomers.

RSU 24 Adult Education

Provides device access (laptops), technical support and Wi-Fi access. Digital skills curricula include Applied Digital Skills (Google), GCF Learn Free, Microsoft, Northstar, and in-house curricula. RSU 24 partners with the National Digital Equity Center to offer live classes.

Lincoln County

Boothbay Region Adult & Community Education

Provides device access (desktops, laptops, peripherals, and other office devices). Digital skills training offered includes computer and hardware basics, video calls, internet browsing, operating system basics, social media, and technical certifications. Curricula includes Northstar and BoomerTech Adventures.

Midcoast Adult and Community Education

Provides device access (desktops, laptops, peripherals, tablets, and other office devices). Digital skills training offered include connecting virtually (video calls, chat, etc.), internet browsing, and social media. The Northstar digital literacy curriculum is offered. Technical support is available to device users through volunteer and paid staff.

Oxford County

Lake Region & Fryeburg Area Adult Education

Offers digital skills training through curricula that includes GCF Learn Free and Ed2Go. The organization has recently partnered with the National Digital Equity Center to begin offering live classes.

MSAD44 Adult & Community Education

Offers courses, one-on-one training and workshops through an in-house curriculum and the National Digital Equity Center. The organization offers laptops for use and provides volunteer tech support.

Region 9 Adult Education

Provides device access (desktops, laptops, peripherals, tablets and other devices). Offers a live online "Applied Workforce Training" class that includes IC3 Digital Literacy Certification, WorkReady, MS Word Certificate and MS Excel Certificate. The organization has begun to work with the National Digital Equity Center as a provider location for live online classes. Curricula offered includes Applied Digital Skills (Google), Microsoft, National Digital Equity Center, Northstar, and in-house curricula.

Penobscot County

Riverside Adult Education

Provides free one on one tutoring services for eligible students interested in strengthening their digital literacy skills. Offers several paid online, self-paced courses to increase digital literacy skills. Laptops, tablets, and other office devices are available to students. Available digital literacy training includes computer and hardware basics, video calls, finding trusted sources online, internet browsing and key software packages. Technical support is provided on computer operations and internet browsing.

RSU 19 Adult Education

Provides digital literacy skills instruction including computer and hardware basics, operating system basics, social media, and technology for health. RSU 19 Adult Education is a partner of National Digital Equity Center for offering on-site

classes. Technical support is provided for desktops, laptops, smartphones, and tablets.

Piscataquis County

Piscataquis Valley Adult Education Cooperative

Provides access to desktop computers and technical support. Digital skills trainings offered include key software packages, operating system basics, social media, and troubleshooting and finding help. The organization is in the process of partnering with the National Digital Equity Center to offer live classes.

York County

Kittery Adult Education

Kittery Adult Education offers the Northstar curricula and partners with the National Digital Equity Center to offer live trainings.

Noble Adult and Community Education

Provides digital literacy skills instruction to students. Students have access to onsite devices and internet and can sign out devices. Students are also able to meet with staff at community sites to reduce travel as a barrier. If meeting eligibility requirements, students can access hot spots for mobile internet service.

Old Orchard Beach/Saco Adult Education

Provides digital literacy training to students including internet browsing, key software packages, and social media. Technical support is offered for computer operations, internet browsing, software packages, social media, and for desktop and laptop computers.

Sanford Community Adult Education

Provides access to desktop and laptop computers to students. Digital skills training offered include internet browsing, job searching, technical certifications, and troubleshooting and finding help online.

AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities is a nationwide program focused on supporting the ability of older adults and residents of all ages to live successfully in their communities. When becoming part of the AARP Network, communities assess needs and develop a plan for supporting livability. The work of a community is driven by local needs and resources.

The following is a sample of how age-friendly communities are supporting digital equity and inclusion:

Cumberland

Age-Friendly Saco

Developed a "handy helper" program which utilizes volunteers to support older adults by providing a tablet computer and connecting them with their municipalities' low-cost internet program. They also provide older residents with Echo Dots (smart devices) that can be used as personal assistants.

Hancock

Age Friendly Sullivan

The steering committee for the community has adapted its work to allow for participation by Zoom, as well as ensuring a Bone Builders exercise class for older adults is offered using a hybrid in-person/electronic model for broader participation. A committee member has also been involved in Sullivan's efforts to expand broadband access to all members of the community, including negotiating with Starlink to erect a satellite internet station which is usable by remote residences that purchase a home unit. Age-Friendly Sullivan also encourages participation in RSU24 Community Education's NDEC classes and provides information to community members about Lifeline services.

Bucksport Bay Healthy Community Coalition

Has purchased tablets and is working with the older adult population to train them on these devices or ones they already own.

Penobscot

Dexter Age-Friendly

Distribution of tablets and referral to the National Digital Equity Center for training.

Sagadahoc

Age-Friendly Georgetown

Helps residents take part in National Digital Equity Center trainings and was formerly a host-site for NDEC in-person classes prior to the pandemic. Age-Friendly Georgetown also currently provides training for computer/smartphone use.

Area Agencies on Aging

Area Agencies on Aging are nonprofit organizations that provide services to older adults to allow them to successfully live independently in their community. These services range from Medicare Counseling and Meals on Wheels, to exercise classes and enrichment programs. Maine has five Area Agencies on Aging that provide services regionally. Several of Maine's AAAs provide digitally equity and inclusion-related services:

Androscoggin

SeniorsPlus

Partners with National Digital Equity Center (NDEC) to provide Mainers in their service area with an iPad, and one year of mobile data. SeniorsPlus has also started hosting NDEC's courses to its consumers.

Aroostook

Aroostook Area Agency on Aging

Utilizes volunteer "Friendly Techies" to help with electronic device set-up, sending emails, and using services through Zoom. The program has iPads that are available to loan to consumers to access AAA services remotely. Friendly Techies provide support to the iPad users.

Cumberland

Southern Maine Agency on Aging

Refers clients to the Affordable Connectivity Program and the National Digital Equity Center.

COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS

Community Action Agencies were established by the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act as vehicles for fighting poverty. Maine has ten Community Action Agencies serving different regions of the state. Community Action Program services differ by location, but common programs include energy assistance, parenting education, and emergency assistance. The following are examples of digital equity and inclusion services reported by Community Action Programs:

Aroostook

Aroostook County Action Program

Educates its consumers about the availability of the Affordable Connectivity Program and assists with applications.

Franklin

Western Maine Community Action

Partnering with Greater Franklin Economic and Community Development's efforts to expand device access and training in Franklin County.

Waldo

Waldo Community Action

Partnered with the National Digital Equity Center to begin offering digital literacy classes in Waldo County.

CAREER CENTERS

Maine's twelve Career Centers provide no cost employment and training services to support Maine workers in building skills and finding a career, while helping businesses connect to workers.

In the digital equity space, Maine Career Centers provide internet access to individuals at Career Center locations. Career Centers have also partnered with the National Digital Equity Center to access their training resources.

Website: https://www.mainecareercenter.gov/

LITERACY VOLUNTEERS

Literacy Volunteers programs are local and regional organizations that pair individuals with low literacy or those for whom English is a second language to volunteer tutors to develop language skills. During the pandemic, the need for remote learning made in-person meetings between literacy volunteers and clients difficult. Literacy Volunteers of Kennebec established a Technology Access Program that provided tablets and internet connectivity and the program was

expanded with $50,000 in funding through Central Maine Power. Funding was provided to eight Literacy Volunteer Programs to increase access to technology and develop technology skills.

Website (Literacy Volunteers of Kennebec County): https://lva-augusta.org/

LOCAL/REGIONAL LIBRARIES

Maine's 255 public Libraries play a crucial role in supporting digital equity and inclusion. Often, libraries are one of the few local public services in rural areas. A key role of libraries is their ability to serve as an access point for free, publicly available wireless internet through the Maine School and Library Network (MSLN) which connects nearly 1,000 schools and libraries across the state.

Other important roles played by public libraries include access to devices, technical support, and training. Libraries have a wide range of computing resources that are available to patrons ranging from desktop computers to Chromebooks that are available in public computing spaces within libraries and which can be borrowed from certain libraries. The amount and nature of computing resources can vary widely depending on the size of the library.

Technical support may be provided by library staff during scheduled drop-in hours or on an ad hoc basis, both for library owned and privately owned devices. Library staff may also provide digital skills training, either informally on a one-on-one basis, through in-house training, or through partnerships with groups such as the National Digital Equity Center.

Going beyond digital literacy skills, library staff also play a role in facilitating access to online resources, whether it is applying for benefits online or helping patrons access job searching resources. Most importantly, these services are free to patrons, helping to overcome economic barriers.

Libraries have begun to expand more into a role as a welcoming space for other services in the community, which helps to expand library services in an environment of limited staffing and financial resources, particularly for small libraries. This is evidenced by partnerships with groups such as the National Digital Equity Center and Career Centers.

During the pandemic with funds through the American Rescue Plan, ten Maine libraries have been also able to take part in a telehealth pilot through the Maine State Library's Libraries Health Connect Program. This program worked with participating libraries to develop private spaces equipped with devices to allow patrons to access telehealth care.

At the state level, the Maine State Library provides capacity building services for Maine's public libraries. For example, as federal relief funds came into the state to provide access to hotspots and devices, Maine State Library took on the role of grant applicant to secure funding for local libraries, which would be beyond the capacity of many small libraries to apply. Maine State Library also maintains the LearningExpress Library 3.0 program which includes basic internet and computer instruction. This learning package can be accessed in public libraries, adult education settings, Career Centers, public schools, or online through the Digital Maine Library.

The following are examples of libraries in Maine of different sizes and in different regions and their offerings related to digital equity and inclusion.

Androscoggin

Lewiston Public Library

- Offers public computer access and broadband internet. Patrons are able to schedule one-on-one technical assistance with staff to access in-depth training for hardware or software.

Aroostook

Cary Public Library

- Provides broadband service and 18 public computers.

Fort Kent Public Library

- Provides public access to devices in the library and technical support.

Cumberland

Bridgton Public Library

- Participates in the Maine State Library Network, allowing 24/7 Wi-Fi access. Offers technology assistance at regular times during the week. Bridgton Public Library has also become an NDEC partner and will be facilitating in-person classes in 2023.

Franklin

Farmington Public Library

- Provides public access to desktop and laptop computers on library premises and library staff provide technical support to patrons for both library devices and personal devices.

Kennebec

Readfield Community Library

- Readfield Community Library offers Wi-Fi access within the library during operating hours, as well as providing 24/7 access outside the library. Public computing access includes one desktop and two laptop computers. Readfield has recently established a "Technology Handy Helpers" program and staff can also help with one-on-one assistance with technology issues.

Gardiner Public Library

- Provides free public computers and broadband access within the library. Four mobile hotspots and four Chromebooks are available for borrowing.

Penobscot

Bangor Public Library

- Bangor Public Library provides broadband access and public computing resources in the form of 24 Windows computers that can be booked in 90-minute intervals per day. Specialized research computers are also available to patrons. Weekly trainings are offered to individuals on digital literacy topics.

Sagadahoc

Town of Bowdoinham Public Library

- Bowdoinham Public Library partnered with the organization Boomer Tech Adventures with funding from the Maine Humanities Center to train ten volunteers to provide one-on-one technical assistance to individuals. Bowdoinham Public Library has also partnered with the National Digital Equity Center to offer classes. Individuals eligible for NDEC services were able to access a computer and one year of internet services.

Waldo

Liberty Library

- Offers public computing devices and Wi-Fi to patrons.

York

Kennebunk Free Library

- Kennebunk has converted a staff position into a full-time Technology Educator position. The library has eight 45-minute slots per week dedicated to one-on-one technology support with the Technology Educator. The Educator also provides ad hoc support outside of scheduled hours. The library loans hot spots and Chromebooks to patrons. Kennebunk Free Library is partnering with their municipality to offer smart speakers and training on their use.

Wells Public Library

- Provides access to desktop computers within the library and free Wi-Fi. Technical assistance is provided with devices and online applications. The library will begin to offer loaned hot spots beginning in January of 2023.

LOCAL/REGIONAL BROADBAND COMMITTEES

Maine's local and regional broadband efforts have been key to driving broadband expansion and undertaking the necessary steps of community engagement, feasibility study, and requests for proposals from broadband providers. The Maine Broadband Coalition maintains an online tool to visualize the different local and regional broadband efforts in the state of Maine.

Website (Maine Broadband Coalition Tracking Tool): https://www.mainebroadbandcoalition.org/initiatives-across-maine

MAINE HOUSING AUTHORITIES

Maine's 23 housing authorities are a source of affordable housing for Maine residents through services such as the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, which assists families with low incomes in accessing safe and affordable housing. The following are examples of how Maine Housing Authorities are supporting digital equity:

Cumberland

Portland Housing Authority

Maintains study centers in four locations in the Housing Authority's family housing neighborhoods. These study centers allow computer and Wi-Fi access for educational use.

Westbrook Housing Authority

Refers families to the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program. Internet access and desktop computers are available in common areas.

Kennebec

Augusta Housing Authority

Refers individuals to the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program and helps them apply. Laptop computers are provided in common areas.

Penobscot

Brewer Housing Authority

Refers individuals to the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program and assists with completing the application. Free internet access is provided to residents in their apartments/homes and desktops and Wi-Fi are available in common areas. Staff members are available to help residents with technical issues and learning how to use devices.

Sagadahoc

Bath Housing Authority

Bath Housing Authority offers internet through all community rooms in housing it maintains and works to share low cost or free options for internet. Bath has also partnered with a local library to address residents' technology needs. The resident coordinators were able to bring a librarian on-site to assist with technology issues. The librarian could also assist with applying for low-cost internet services or free cell phones, help people set up tablets, and similar activities. Although no longer operating due to a staff departure at the library, this was an innovative partnership to facilitate digital equity and inclusion for residents.

York

Biddeford Housing

Free Wi-Fi internet access and desktop computers are provided in common areas. Residents are referred to community resources for technical support and digital skills.

Sanford Housing Authority

Free internet access is provided to individuals in their residences. Tablets and Wi-Fi are available in common areas. Staff members are able to assist residents with technical issues and learning how to use electronic devices.

York Housing

Has negotiated a flat rate internet plan for residents. Wi-Fi is provided in common areas and staff members can assist with technical issues and helping residents learn how to use electronic devices.

MAINE STREET MAINE COMMUNITIES

Main Street America is a "network consisting of over 40 coordinating programs and over 1,200 neighborhoods and communities across the country committed to creating high-quality places and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development." Maine Downtown Center is Maine's Coordinating Program for Main Street America. Maine has 10 nationally designated Main Street Maine programs and 14 state designated Maine Downtown Affiliate programs. As part of the asset inventory, the Main Street Maine programs and Maine Downtown Affiliates were surveyed about what public internet access is available in their communities.

Fifteen Downtown communities participated in the survey. Libraries were identified by all communities as sources of internet access available to the public and eight of the fifteen towns identified municipal buildings as another source of Wi-Fi. Using Wi-Fi signal extenders, several of the towns indicated that wireless internet covers significant sections of downtown areas and areas immediately surrounding libraries and municipal buildings.

AROOSTOOK COUNTY RESOURCES

MI'KMAQ NATION

The Mi'kmaq Nation's Health Department maintains guest wireless access and Wi-Fi is present at tribal facilities in Presque Isle. Computing resources are available to youth via the Boys and Girls Club. The Mi'kmaq Nation is currently developing community center computer rooms at Connor and Littleton housing developments.

CUMBERLAND COUNTY RESOURCES

GREATER PORTLAND IMMIGRANT WELCOME CENTER

The organization "serves as a hub of collaboration that strengthens the immigrant community through language acquisition, economic integration, and civic engagement." Digital equity and inclusion services provided through the Center include maintaining a co-working space and providing the iEnglish project, which utilizes an English learning platform that also provides workforce and career skills including digital literacy.

Covered populations of focus: Immigrants and refugees

Website: https://www.welcomeimmigrant.org/

NEW MAINERS RESOURCE CENTER

New Mainers Resource Center, a program of Portland Adult Education, provides workforce integration services to new Mainers. Offerings include a six-week ELL Basic Computer Class offered through Portland Adult Education.

Covered populations of focus: Immigrants and refugees

Website: https://nmrcmaine.org/services-for-job-seekers/

FRANKLIN COUNTY RESOURCES

GREATER FRANKLIN ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The organization has worked to connect 11,000 addresses to a fiber-to-the-home network via funding through provider, federal, state and municipal investments. The organization is partnering with Mt. Blue and Spruce Mountain Adult Education in the implementation of a three-year funded initiative to provide digital literacy services and Affordable Connectivity Program outreach countywide starting in January of 2023.

Website: www.greaterfranklin.org

KNOX COUNTY RESOURCES

ISLAND INSTITUTE

The Island Institute has taken a key role in broadband expansion in island and Coastal Maine communities through its Community Driven Broadband Process designed to shepherd communities through the broadband planning process including education about broadband benefits, community engagement, needs and feasibility assessments, and selecting appropriate funding models. The Island Institute offers a Community-Driven Broadband Guide, case studies, and broadband planning grants.

Website: https://www.islandinstitute.org/priorities/resilient-economies/broadband/

PENOBSCOT COUNTY RESOURCES

FOUR DIRECTIONS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Four Directions is partnering with the National Digital Equity Center on the implementation of NDEC's Digital Navigator program.

The Corporation has also worked to establish Native Entrepreneur Centers and have partnered with give IT. get IT. to access technology for the Centers.

The Corporation is also supporting outreach to tribal citizens to access the Affordable Connectivity Program.

Website: https://fourdirectionsmaine.org/

WASHINGTON COUNTY RESOURCES

FAMILY FUTURES DOWNEAST

The Family Futures Downeast Program is a collaborative program of six organizations designed to "promote post-secondary education for parents and early childhood education for their children as a means to reduce poverty, create employment opportunities and improve stability in Washington County, Maine families."

Digital equity and inclusion support provided include technology skill development and laptop and Wi-Fi hotspots that are loaned to participants.

Website: https://familyfuturesdowneast.org/about-us/

PASSAMAQUODDY COMMUNITIES

Through participation in the Downeast Broadband Utility, Indian Township has gained access to fiberoptic broadband and the community is currently in the process of establishing hookups for individual households to gain access to the service.

In terms of device access and public internet, the Indian Township Passamaquoddy Education Department offers space and internet accessibility for community members. Efforts are currently underway to identify other potential areas for public Wi-Fi access, including the Youth and Recreation Center and tribal government office. The Education Department has partnered with Abbott Labs to receive refurbished computers that are made available to students.

To support digital literacy, the Education Department is working with the National Digital Equity Center to have a staff member trained as a Digital Navigator to provide training on digital literacy topics and to connect community members to internet affordability programs.

In addition to the enhanced FCC Affordable Connectivity Program for tribal members, there is also a tribal affordability fund that extends eligibility to tribal crafters, veterans, people in addiction recovery, and people using telehealth services.

SUNRISE COUNTY ECONOMIC COUNCIL
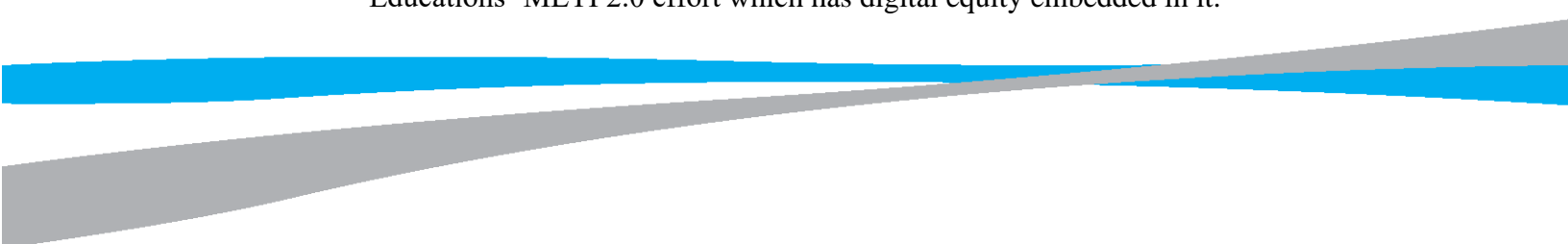
Sunrise County Economic Council "initiates and facilitates the creation of jobs and prosperity in Washington County, Maine, by working with a consortium of community-minded businesses, not-for-profit organizations, municipalities and citizens."

The Council has been involved in community owned broadband expansion efforts in Downeast Maine and has offered Broadband Bootcamps on Broadband 101, digital equity and literacy, community engagement, meeting ISPs, cooperative/municipally owned broadband, and broadband funding sources.

Website: https://sunrisecounty.org/community/broadband/

DIGITAL EQUITY PLANS

For the most part, key informants and survey respondents did not identify digital equity plans that they had adopted. Exceptions that were notable include The Maine Learning and Technology Plan that governs the Maine Department of Educations' MLTI 2.0 effort which has digital equity embedded in it.

The National Digital Equity Center has been active in helping communities to facilitate digital equity planning. Each plan includes an assessment of community needs and characteristics and an action plan. Equity plans have been completed with the following towns and regions:

Belfast	Lakes Region (Regional)	Northern Maine Lakes (Regional)	Somerset (Regional)
Bowdoin	Lincoln County (Regional)	Penobscot	Stonington
Bremen	Maine West Towns (Regional)	Penobscot County (Regional)	Three Bridged Islands
Brooklin	Monhegan Plantation	Piscataquis (Regional)	Washington
Eastport	Mount Vernon	Roque Bluffs	
Katahdin area (Regional)	Northern Lake Towns (Regional)	Searsport	

ASSET GAPS AND DIGITAL EQUITY CHALLENGES

Key informants were asked to identify gaps in current assets and ongoing digital equity and inclusion challenges. The following is a summary of themes identified across key informant interviews.

Cross-cutting themes

While great strides have been made in broadband expansion in Maine, key informants indicated that there are still rural areas that do not have broadband or are in cellular dead zones. For example, during the pandemic, hotspots were distributed to students and through other venues, but this effort was hampered to some extent by lack of cellular service.

Poverty underlays a number of digital equity and inclusion challenges. Lack of affordable broadband and affordable device access is amplified for low-income individuals. This was mentioned in the context of students, who may experience gaps in home versus school equity that grow more acute as technology becomes more important in educational settings. For people in poverty, bad credit,

outstanding bills with providers, and other financial challenges can be setbacks for connectivity.

It was also noted by key informants serving covered populations that there is evidence that people from these covered populations experience poverty at a higher rate, thus exacerbating digital equity issues.

Limited staffing capacity as well as expertise in digital equity and inclusion services show opportunities for collaborative efforts that bring services together, allowing organizations to maintain areas of expertise while also offering a broader range of services for their clients.

For example, with ARPA and Cares Act funding coming into the state of Maine during the pandemic, there was a proliferation of device loan programs to respond to the needs of community members needing to remotely access services and supports. Key informants indicated that while timely and helpful, programs had to develop systems for loans and device servicing that were outside of their usual programmatic areas.

In the affordable housing domain, resident coordinators, who are the most plausible point of support for resident needs, often don't have the time to focus on in-depth technical issues. Additionally, multiple key informants indicated that for programs that loan out devices, there is not always staff capacity to provide necessary assistance in device setup and ongoing technical assistance.

Of the key areas of digital equity and inclusion, device access was the most frequently identified asset gap. For many individuals, cell phones are their only device and these have limitations in supporting more in-depth educational or workforce related needs.

Individual with disabilities

Adults with disabilities in community-based settings or facilities have "hit or miss" connectivity issues because connectivity differs by housing provider. A key informant identified a potential policy solution of having funding to providers through Medicaid or for developmental services include requirements for access. Connectivity could also be included in lists of fundamental rights for people with disabilities.

Another issue identified as a need for individuals with disabilities is more training capacity. MaineCare supports funding for assessment, purchasing technology, and training, but the training time for assistive equipment is limited.

Immigrant and refugees

The state's migrant populations were identified as a group that may not be adequately served. For students of migrant parents, frequently moving from

school to school may not allow the time for teachers and administrators to become knowledgeable of the students' needs. A key informant indicated that ensuring providers of digital equity and inclusion services are versed in the needs of immigrant and refugee communities is key to being able to serve this population effectively.

Maine's tribal communities

Telehealth was identified as an area that would benefit from additional funding. Maine's tribal citizens often live in areas of the state removed from medical services. Funding to develop a sustainable model of telehealth would be of benefit to tribal communities.

Funding

A challenge for philanthropy is that there is a perception that broadband work is beyond funding capacity. They also tend to partner more with nonprofits rather than municipalities. One niche for funders is planning capacity. Additionally, funders like to be able to leverage their dollars and a key question is how do digital equity advocates create more leverage and what are the opportunities to do that.

Infrastructure and operations

Libraries struggle with space, particularly private space that would be necessary for some digital uses. Staff capacity is also lacking, limiting the ability of staff members to provide expanded services around digital equity and inclusion. A key informant suggested funding planning grants to help libraries to develop strategies for space and staff capacity.

For two of the largest digital equity providers, NDEC and give IT. get IT., funding priorities included accessing funds for the expansion of services that would allow them to partner with organizations to manage all aspects of device procurement, maintenance, and digital literacy training.

ASSETS BY ECOSYSTEM ROLE

Organization/Asset	State or Regional /Local	*Capacity Building	Affordable Broadband	Broadband Access	Device Access	Tech Support	Digital Literacy		Goal setting/ client needs assessment
Adult Education	Reg/Local						X		

Organization/Asset	State or Regional /Local	*Capacity Building	Affordable Broadband	Broadband Access	Device Access	Tech Support	Digital Literacy		Goal setting/ client needs assessment
Affordable Connectivity Program	Statewide		X						
Age-Friendly Communities	Reg/Local		X	X	X	X	X		
Area Agencies on Aging	Reg/Local		X	X	X	X	X		
Associates for Training and Development	Statewide						X		
Career Centers	Reg/Local						X		
Community Action Programs	Reg/local				X	X	X		
Disability Rights Maine	Statewide	X							
Evernorth	Statewide		X						
Family Futures Downeast	Reg/Local		X	X	X				
Four Directions Development Corporation	Reg/Local		X	X	X	X	X		
give IT. get IT.	Statewide				X	X	X		X
Greater Franklin Economic and Community Development	Reg/local	X					X		
Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center	Reg/Local			X	X		X		
In Her Presence	Statewide		X		X				
Island Institute	Reg/Local	X							

Organization/Asset	State or Regional /Local	*Capacity Building	Affordable Broadband	Broadband Access	Device Access	Tech Support	Digital Literacy		Goal setting/ client needs assessment
Jobs for Maine Graduates	Statewide				X				
Lifeline	Statewide		X						
Literacy Volunteers	Reg/Local		X	X	X		X		
Local/Regional Broadband Committees	Reg/Local	X							
Local/Regional Libraries	Reg/Local		X	X	X	X	X		
Maine Broadband Coalition	Statewide	X							
Maine Bureau of Veterans Services	Statewide				X				
Maine Connectivity Authority	Statewide	X							
Maine Department of Corrections	Statewide				X		X		
Maine Department of Education	Statewide			X	X	X			
Maine Department of Health and Human Services	Statewide		X		X				
Maine Developmental Disabilities Council	Statewide	X			X				
Maine Housing Authorities	Reg/Local			X	X				

Organization/Asset	State or Regional /Local	*Capacity Building	Affordable Broadband	Broadband Access	Device Access	Tech Support	Digital Literacy		Goal setting/ client needs assessment
Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition	Statewide	X							
Maine Philanthropy Center	Statewide	X							
Maine State Library	Statewide		X	X	X	X	X		
Maine Street Maine Communities	Reg/Local			X					
MaineCITE	Statewide	X			X	X			
National Digital Equity Center	Statewide		X	X	X	X	X		X
New Mainers Resource Center	Reg/Local						X		
Northeast Telehealth Resource Center	Statewide	X							
Passamaquoddy Communities	Local		X	X	X	X	X		
Spurwink Alltech	Statewide				X	X			
Sunrise County Economic Council	Reg/Local	X							
The Iris Network	Statewide				X	X			
Veterans Health Administration	Statewide		X		X				

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW TOOL

The following are questions that were asked of key informants who participated in interviews. The goal of the questions was to identify significant digital equity assets in the state for the profile and identify gaps in digital equity assets.

1. What resources or programs does your organization provide that focus on digital equity and inclusion or incorporate digital equity and inclusion principles?
    1. Please give an overview of each of the programs/resources.
2. Does your organization have a written plan for digital equity and inclusion?
    1. If yes, how did you develop or adopt the plan?
    2. If yes, are you able to share the plan?
    3. If not, is your organization considering one?
3. For each of the digital equity and inclusion programs/resources you have identified:
    1. Which specific populations, if any, are the focus for your organization/program?
    2. What are the geographic areas your organization/program covers?
4. How have the programs/resources you have identified been designed to improve digital equity and inclusion?
    1. To what extent have the digital equity programs your organization offers been evaluated for their effectiveness?
        1. Tracking outputs
        2. Process evaluation
        3. Outcome evaluation
    2. What metrics are currently being utilized to measure the outcomes of the digital equity programs offered by your organization?
5. If the organization/program has a digital equity plan:
    1. Who are the specific populations that are covered in the equity plan your organization/program has adopted?
    2. What are the geographic areas your digital equity plan covers?
6. How is your organization/program financially supported?
    1. Do you feel the digital equity and inclusion programming is sustainable financially?
7. Does your organization/program have interest in scaling up its digital equity and inclusion work?
    1. If yes, what financial and other resources would be necessary to do this?
8. Thinking about digital equity and inclusion across the state of Maine, what do you think are the greatest gaps in programming or resources?
    1. Are there any geographic areas that are particularly underserved or under-resourced?
    2. Are there any groups of people who are particularly underserved or under-resourced?
9. What programs in Maine are you aware of that provide digital equity and inclusion programs or resources that would be important for us to include in our asset inventory?

APPENDIX B – SURVEY TOOL

The following is the electronic survey instrument that was used with a wide variety of digital equity assets with the goal of gathering detailed information about resources that could be integrated into an online directory through the Maine Connectivity Authority. The survey was organized into "blocks" so that survey content was displayed on multiple pages. These blocks are preserved in this appendix.

Start of Block: About Your Organization/Programming

Maine Digital Equity and Inclusion Asset Survey

Over the course of the next nine months or so, the State of Maine will be developing a state Digital Equity Plan for the first time. The Maine Connectivity Authority is partnering with the University of Maine Center on Aging to conduct an inventory of programs and services related to all of these elements. The inventory will be complete by the end of the year, and your help is essential to ensure it includes all of the digital inclusion plans, programs, and tools that are available to people in Maine. Please help us by completing this survey as soon as possible, to ensure that your information is included in the asset inventory.

What is your organization/program's name?

_____

Please provide a brief description of your organization or program's efforts to support digital inclusion and equity.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please select the categories of digital inclusion services for which your organization/program delivers services. (Select all that apply)

☐ Broadband Access & Affordability [Select if your organization/program helps individuals afford broadband services or reduces barriers to accessing broadband]

☐ Device Access [Select if your organization or program helps people access affordable digital devices. This could include organizations and programs along the entire device supply chain, including device donation sources, refurbishers, retailers, and distribution locations]

☐ Digital Skills & Technical Support [Select if your organization or program offers digital skills training resources or technical support services. These may include in-person services as well as tools and resources available digitally.]

☐ Public Device & Internet Access [Select if your organization or program provides publicly-available digital devices and broadband access. In contrast to the prior 'Broadband Access & Affordability' and 'Device Access' sections, which focus on personal service or devices, this section focuses on shared resources. This could include computers and internet access available at central locations (e.g., library or senior center).]

☐ Digital Inclusion Funding [Select if your organization or program funds digital inclusion work in any or all of the other categories.]

☐ None of the above apply

City/town in which your organization/program is located.

_____

Website address for your organization/program (if applicable)

_____

If you are willing to provide contact info for yourself so we can follow-up about any questions, we'd appreciate it!

○ Your name _____

○ Your email address

_____

What is the area served by the organization/program. Please write in the names of the areas served.

○ Town _____

○ Region _____

○ County _____

○ State _____

○ School District

_____

Please select any historically underserved groups your organization/program focuses its digital inclusion services on (Select all that apply)

- [ ] English Language Learners
- [ ] Immigrants or Refugees
- [ ] Incarcerated Persons
- [ ] LGBTQ+ Persons
- [ ] Low-Income Households
- [ ] Members of Racial or Ethnic Minority Groups
- [ ] Older Adults
- [ ] Persons with Disabilities
- [ ] Persons with Low Literacy Levels
- [ ] Rural Residents
- [ ] Tribal members
- [ ] Veterans
- [ ] Youth
- [ ] Other (please describe)

_____

What is the primary issue focus, if any, of the organization/program's work? (Select all that apply)

- [ ] Community Action Programming
- [ ] Community Development
- [ ] Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
- [ ] Economic Development
- [ ] Education
- [ ] Faith-Based
- [ ] Health
- [ ] Homelessness
- [ ] Housing
- [ ] Labor/Workers Rights
- [ ] Social Services
- [ ] Workforce/Job Training
- [ ] Other (please describe)

Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plans are created to reduce the barriers to broadband adoption and increase digital inclusion efforts, which include affordable

broadband, affordable equipment, digital skills training, and public computer access. What digital inclusion plans or policies has your organization/program adopted?

○ We have our own digital inclusion plan that we've adopted as an organization/program

○ We have adopted a digital inclusion plan that was developed by another group or organization

○ We are currently developing or looking to adopt a digital inclusion plan

○ We don't have a digital inclusion plan

○ Other (please describe)

_____

End of Block: About Your Organization/Programming

Start of Block: Broadband Access & Affordability

What broadband internet access and affordability services does your organization/program provide? (Select all that apply)

☐ Referring people to the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program

☐ Assisting people in applying for the FCC Affordable Connectivity Program

☐ Referring individuals to discount programs other than the Affordable Connectivity Program (please describe)

_____

☐ None of the above

☐ Other (please describe)

_____

What are the criteria used to determine who qualifies for broadband access or affordability services?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How many individuals have been served by your organization/program's broadband access and affordability services last year?

○ Less than 50

○ 51 - 100

○ 101-500

○ 501-1000

○ 1000+

End of Block: Broadband Access & Affordability

Start of Block: Device Access

What are the types of digital devices available to users through your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

☐ Accessible/Adapted Devices

☐ Desktop

☐ Laptop

☐ Peripherals (Monitors, Keyboards, Mice, Webcams, etc.)

☐ Smartphone

☐ Tablet

☐ Other Office Devices (Printers, Scanners, etc.)

What is the cost, if any, of the digital devices offered by your organization/program? Also, are there any additional eligibility criteria for receiving a device?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What are the criteria used to determine who qualifies to purchase or receive a device through your organization/program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Who are the established partners your organization/program works with to source or provide devices?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What were the number of devices provided by your organization/program last year?

○ Less than 50

○ 51 - 100

○ 101-500

○ 501-1000

○ 1000+

What delivery formats for digital skills training or technical support are offered by your organization/program? [Select all that apply]

☐ Courses

☐ One-on-One

☐ Workshops

☐ Other:

_____

What is the cost, if any, for the digital skills or technical support services offered by your organization/program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What are the criteria used to determine who qualifies to participate in the digital skills or technical support services through your organization/program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please select the digital skills covered in the trainings offered by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

- [ ] Coding
- [ ] Computer & Hardware Basics
- [ ] Connecting Virtually (video calls, chat, etc.)
- [ ] Finding Trusted Sources for Additional Learning
- [ ] Internet Browsing
- [ ] Job Searching & Applying Online
- [ ] Key Software Packages (MS Office, Google Drive, etc.)
- [ ] Online Finances (managing bank accounts, shopping, etc.)
- [ ] Operating System Basics
- [ ] Privacy, Security, & Data Protection
- [ ] Social Media
- [ ] Technical Certifications
- [ ] Troubleshooting & Finding Help
- [ ] Technology for health (Fitbit, Apple Watch, etc.)
- [ ] Other: _____

What established curriculum, if any, are used for the digital skills trainings offered by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

- [ ] AARP
- [ ] Amazon
- [ ] Applied Digital Skills - Google
- [ ] Digital Learn
- [ ] GCF Learn Free
- [ ] In-House Curriculum
- [ ] LinkedIn Learning
- [ ] Microsoft
- [ ] National Digital Equity Center
- [ ] Northstar
- [ ] Tech Boomers
- [ ] Tech Goes Home
- [ ] Trailhead - Salesforce
- [ ] Web Literacy - Mozilla
- [ ] WebJunction
- [ ] Other: _____

What categories of technical support are offered by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Computer Operations (turning on and logging in, connecting to Wi-Fi, etc.)
- ☐ Computer Speed-Up/Clean-Up
- ☐ Connecting Virtually (video calls, chat, etc.)
- ☐ Hardware Support/Repair
- ☐ Internet Browsing
- ☐ Key Software Packages (MS Office, Google Drive, etc.)
- ☐ Other Privacy, Security, & Data Protection Support
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Software Installation & Updates
- ☐ Virus & Malware Removal
- ☐ We do not offer technical support services
- ☐ Other

What types of devices does your organization/program offer technical support for? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Desktops
- ☐ Hot spots
- ☐ Laptops
- ☐ Smartphones
- ☐ Tablets
- ☐ Other

How many individuals were served with digital skills training or technical support services in the last year?

○ Less than 50

○ 51 - 100

○ 101-500

○ 501-1000

○ 1000+

What types of public computing resources are provided by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

☐ Laptop Computer

☐ Desktop Computer

☐ Community Hotspots

☐ WiFi Hotspot

☐ Public Wi-Fi

☐ Smartphone

☐ Tablet

☐ Other

_____

What is the cost, if any, for use of the public devices or internet access offered by your organization/program at your location?

_____

What are the criteria used to determine who qualifies to use the public devices or internet access through your organization/program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Is technical support available to users of the public devices or internet access offered by the organization/program?

○ Yes

○ No

Who is technical support provided by? (Select all that apply)

☐ Volunteer tech support

☐ Paid staff

☐ Partnering organization (please identify)

_____

How many individuals were served with public device or internet services in the last year?

○ Less than 50

○ 51 - 100

○ 101-500

○ 501-1000

○ 1000+

What type of financial support for digital inclusion is offered by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

☐ Grant

☐ In-Kind

☐ Loan

☐ Other

_____

What methods of applying for and determining recipients of funding are offered by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

☐ Competitive

☐ Discretionary

☐ Formula

☐ Invitation Only

☐ Other

_____

What can funding provided by your organization/program be used for? (Select all that apply)

☐ Broadband Access

☐ Broadband Infrastructure

☐ Device Access

☐ Digital Literacy/Skill Building

☐ Digital Navigators

☐ Technical Support

How frequently is funding for digital inclusion offered by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

☐ Annual

☐ Continuous

☐ Intermittent

☐ Revolving

☐ Semi-Annual

☐ Other

_____

What are Important dates or timeframes, if known, for upcoming digital inclusion funding opportunities offered by your organization/program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What organization types are eligible to apply for the funding offered by your organization/program? (Select all that apply)

- [ ] Federal Government
- [ ] Foundation/Philanthropic
- [ ] Higher Education
- [ ] Housing Authority
- [ ] Internet Service Provider
- [ ] K-12 School
- [ ] Library
- [ ] Local Government
- [ ] Nonprofit
- [ ] Private Sector
- [ ] State Government
- [ ] Other

_____

What is the total amount of funding offered by your organization/program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is the maximum amount an application or recipient may be awarded from the funding offered by your organization/program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____
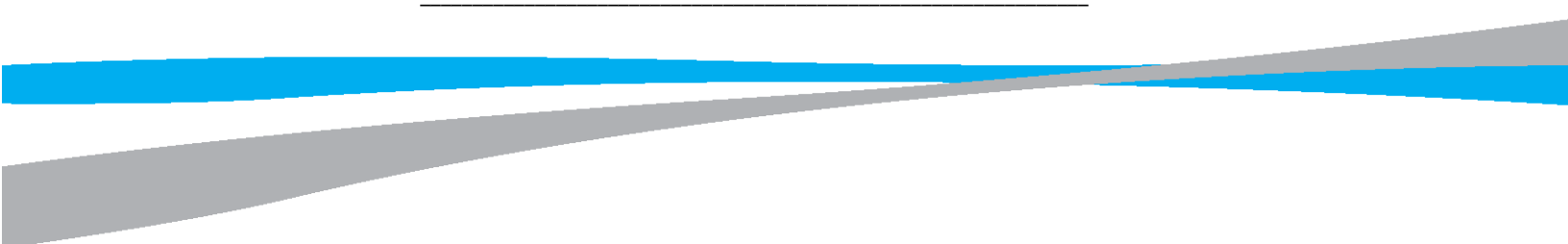
End of Block: Digital Inclusion Funding