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# Introduction to the Digital Equity (DE) Competitive Grant Program

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*Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program*

July 2024



This document is intended solely to assist recipients in better understanding the Digital Equity Competitive Grant program and the requirements set forth in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for this program. This document does not and is not intended to supersede, modify, or otherwise alter applicable statutory or regulatory requirements, or the specific application requirements set forth in the NOFO. In all cases, statutory and regulatory mandates, and the requirements set forth in the NOFO, shall prevail over any inconsistencies contained in this document.

# DIGITAL EQUITY COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

## What is the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program?

*The Competitive Grant Program will make funds available to a wide range of entities to address barriers to digital equity faced by Covered Populations as defined by 47 U.S.C. §1721(8). The Competitive Grant Program will support efforts to achieve digital equity, promote digital inclusion activities, and spur greater adoption and meaningful use of broadband among the Covered Populations.*

*Awards will focus on **addressing the needs** of the Covered Populations **not met** by the Capacity Grant Program and will **strive for a diverse pool of recipients**.*

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE FUNDS?

**Eligible Entities are defined in 47 U.S.C. 1724(b). The following are eligible, so long as the entity is not serving, and has not served as the administering entity for a State under either the Planning Grant Program or Capacity Grant Program:**



A political subdivision, agency, or instrumentality of a State, including an agency of a State that is responsible for administering or supervising adult education and literacy activities, or for providing public housing, in the State.



An Indian Tribe, an Alaska Native entity, or a Native Hawaiian organization (Native Entities).



A foundation, corporation, institution, or association that is –  
 a. a not-for-profit entity; and  
 b. not a school.



A community anchor institution.



A local educational agency.



An entity that carries out a workforce development program.



A partnership between any of the entities described above.

U.S. Territories may apply for the territorial set aside provided for at 47 U.S.C. §1724(j)(3) by submitting an application consistent with Section IV of the NOFO.



There is a statutory set-aside available for the Native Entities described above, as provided at 47 U.S.C. 1724(j)(2). Native Entities should submit their applications as directed by Section IV of the NOFO.



# DIGITAL EQUITY COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

## WHO ARE THE COVERED POPULATIONS?

The programs outlined in the Digital Equity Act focus on promoting large scale social and economic change by centering on digital equity, digital inclusion, and digital literacy among the Covered Populations. ***The Covered Populations are defined by the Statute (47 U.S.C. 1721(8)).***



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



Individuals with **disabilities**



Individuals with a **language barrier**, including individuals who are English learners and have low levels of literacy



**Aging** individuals aged 60 and older



**Incarcerated individuals** (as defined by the State or Territory), other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility



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



**Veterans**



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

## HOW CAN GRANT FUNDS BE SPENT?

### *Allowable Uses of Funds | 47 U.S.C 1724(d)(2)*



**To develop and implement** digital inclusion activities that benefit one or more of the Covered Populations.



**To facilitate the adoption of broadband** by Covered Populations to provide educational and employment opportunities to those populations.



**Implement training programs** for Covered Populations that cover basic, advanced, and applied skills or other workforce development programs, including digital inclusion projects that address online safety, and work to prevent online harassment and abuse.



**To make available** equipment, instrumentation, networking capability hardware and software, or digital network technology for broadband services to Covered Populations at low or no cost.



**Construct, upgrade, expand, or operate new or existing** public access computing centers for Covered Populations through community anchor institutions.

# DIGITAL EQUITY COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

## IS THERE COST SHARING AND MATCHING?

- ➔ 47 U.S.C. 1724(d)(2)(C) states that the amount of a Competitive Grant awarded to an Eligible Entity through this program **may not exceed 90 percent** of the total project cost (i.e. Grantees must secure at least 10% matching funds).
- ➔ NTIA will give additional consideration to applications that exceed the minimum matching requirement during the review process.

## PARTNERSHIPS: WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER



When applying as a partnership, **one Eligible Entity must be designated as the Applicant** and serve as the Authorized Representative for the grant application.

- An Eligible Entity may serve as the Applicant for only one partnership, although they may participate as a member of more than one partnership.

For the Native Entity set aside, **the Applicant of a partnership must be a Native Entity** and serve as the Authorized Representative. The intended beneficiaries of the proposed programs must be Covered Populations that are members of a Native Entity.

- A Native Entity partnership may have non-Native Entity partners so long as the *Authorized Representative* is a Native Entity, and all intended beneficiaries of the proposed programs are Covered Populations that are members of a Native Entity.

## KEY MILESTONES AND DEADLINES



**Period of Performance** | Recipients will have **four years** from the date of the award to expend the grant. Grant recipients may continue to measure and evaluate the activities supported with the grant amounts for a period of **one year** after the initial four-year Period of Performance.



**Application Due Dates** | **September 23, 2024 - 60 days** after the NOFO is released for Eligible Entities.

**October 22, 2024 - 90 days** after the NOFO is released for United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and any other territory of possession of the United States (“U.S. Territories”).



**Issuing Awards** | NTIA expects to begin issuing awards to Eligible Entities by Winter of 2024 and no later than April 20, 2025. NTIA expects to make additional awards on a rolling basis.



**Application Submission** | Complete applications must be received through the NTIA Grants Portal (<https://grants.ntia.gov>) no later than **11:59 p.m.** Eastern Time (ET) of the **due date**.

# DIGITAL EQUITY COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

## COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM APPROPRIATIONS

→ Congress appropriated \$1.25 billion to fund the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). These funds are made available to NTIA each fiscal year as follows:

FY 2022: \$250M	FY 2023: \$250M	FY 2024: \$250M	FY 2025: \$250M	FY 2026: \$250M
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**Note:** The appropriations language governs NTIA’s availability of funds, not the NOFO. Congress has appropriated \$750,000,000, less NTIA’s cost of administering the program, for grants under the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program through fiscal year 2024. Congress has also appropriated an additional \$250,000,000, less administrative expenses, for fiscal year 2025 which is anticipated to become available in October of 2024. If these funds become available, NTIA intends to award these additional funds.

## HOW ARE THE GRANT AWARDS DETERMINED?

**Grant awards will be made on a competitive basis** under the criteria outlined in the Competitive NOFO Section V and will depend upon the number of applicants and the size of the proposals submitted. The grants issued will be singular grants with a single period of performance.

NTIA expects to make Competitive Grant awards within a range of:

**\$5,000,000 and \$12,000,000** Per Recipient for Eligible Entities and Native Entity applicants

**\$1,000,000 to \$2,500,000** Per Recipient for US Territories

*\*Applicants applying outside of that range must provide a reasonable justification for the variance.*



Because U.S. Territories are not Eligible Entities and cannot participate directly in the Competitive Grant Program, these funds are made available through the set-aside provision of 47 U.S.C. 1724(j)(3) and will undergo a separate review process using the same application requirements.