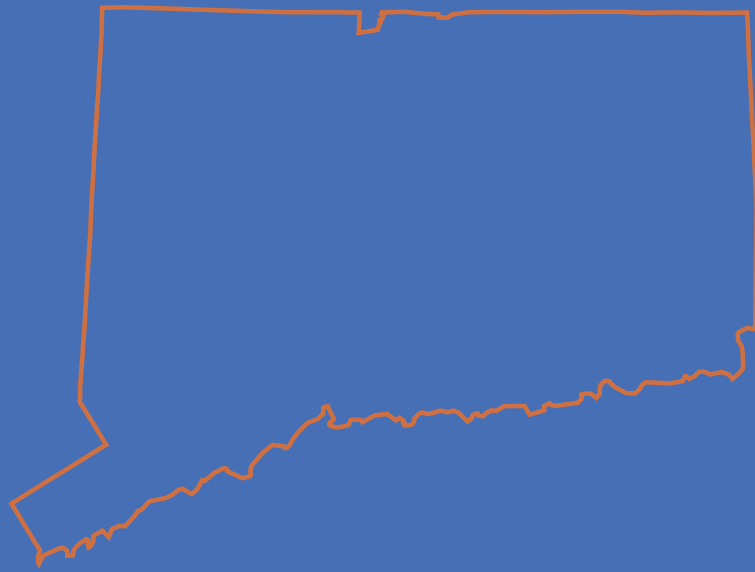

CONNECTICUT
**EVERYONE
CONNECTED**



SECTION 1
**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**



SECTION 1: Executive Summary



The Commission welcomes input on the Digital Equity Plan through January 19, 2024. To share your thoughts, fill out our short public comment form, write us at DigitalEquity@ct.gov, or call (860) 622-2032.

Vision

The State of Connecticut defines “Digital Equity” as “a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for participation in society, democracy, and the economy of the state” (CGS § 289). That is the vision behind this plan, “Connecticut: Everyone Connected,” which defines the resources, challenges, and path forward to making sure all residents can flourish in a society that depends ever more on access to digital tools and the skills to use them.

In 2022, Governor Ned Lamont called on the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology within the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to lead the State’s efforts around digital equity. Initial funding for this work comes through the Digital Equity Program, created as part of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Federal guidelines require that Connecticut’s plan address the following aspects of digital equity:



Availability and affordability of internet access and devices



Digital literacy, including training to help develop cybersecurity and other skills



Technical support



Access to public resources and services

The federal Digital Equity Program asks Connecticut to address the above goals as they pertain to priority groups (“covered populations”) and outcomes:

COVERED POPULATIONS

Those living at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty line
Aging individuals
People incarcerated in State correctional facilities
Veterans
Individuals with disabilities
People with a language barrier (English learners and those with low literacy levels)
Members of a racial or ethnic minority group
Residents who primarily reside in a rural area

OUTCOMES

Economic and workforce development
Education
Health
Civic and social engagement
Delivery of essential services

See Section 2 to learn more about the State’s **Vision** for digital equity.

Current State of Digital Equity

Designing a plan with measurable outcomes requires an understanding of what resources are in place to support these efforts – and of the gaps to achieving digital equity in the state. In 2022 and 2023, the DAS digital equity team conducted research in partnership with other State agencies, the University of Connecticut School of Public Policy, and other stakeholder groups to establish these baseline measures. Key components of the research include the following:



Resident Survey

Measures of access to technology and the barriers to connections, devices, training, and support that residents face



Partner Survey

An index of the programs that support access to broadband, devices, and digital skills training



Expert Interviews

Based on the covered populations and target outcomes, discussions with State and other agencies to understand existing programs and barriers to achieving digital equity



Focus Groups

In-depth discussions with members of covered populations to identify barriers in accessing and using technology



General Research

Analysis of existing data sets – especially those from highly reliable sources such as the U.S. Census American Community Survey – and academic literature

Based on the activities above, the digital equity team created an inventory of resources that expand access to technology and digital skills, as well as a needs assessment to close the digital divide in Connecticut.





Asset Inventory

Hundreds of programs exist across the state to assist residents in getting online and using technology for learning, work, healthcare, and other beneficial activities.

Federal Programs

More than 170,000 Connecticut households participate in the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), with credits to offset home broadband costs totaling more than \$23M to date and providing device purchase assistance to more than 25,000 residents, totaling nearly \$2.5M. Additional funding is helping communities like East Hartford, Hartford, and New Haven with outreach efforts to increase enrollment. Expansion of broadband will take place through federal programs. And for nearly 25 years, the Connecticut Education Network has provided high-speed, protected internet connections to schools, libraries, universities, and other anchor institutions.

State Agency Resources

Coordinated strategic plans across 20+ State agencies address the economic, education, health, civic, and service-delivery goals of the Digital Equity Program.

Regional Initiatives

Existing regional groups include education centers, councils of government, and workforce boards that provide training and outreach to increase access to technology and skill development.

Local and Community Initiatives

Town-level as well as federal investments have helped local institutions — especially libraries — establish and expand novel initiatives such as “digital navigator” programs that train residents on how to get connected and use digital services to improve their lives.

Needs Assessment

Based on the activities above, the digital equity team has developed Digital Connection, Digital Literacy, and Digital Security benchmarks for all residents and members of each covered population:

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT DIGITAL EQUITY IN CONNECTICUT?



DIGITAL CONNECTION BENCHMARK

Residents have all three:
 -A computer
 -A smartphone
 -A wired home internet connection



DIGITAL LITERACY BENCHMARK

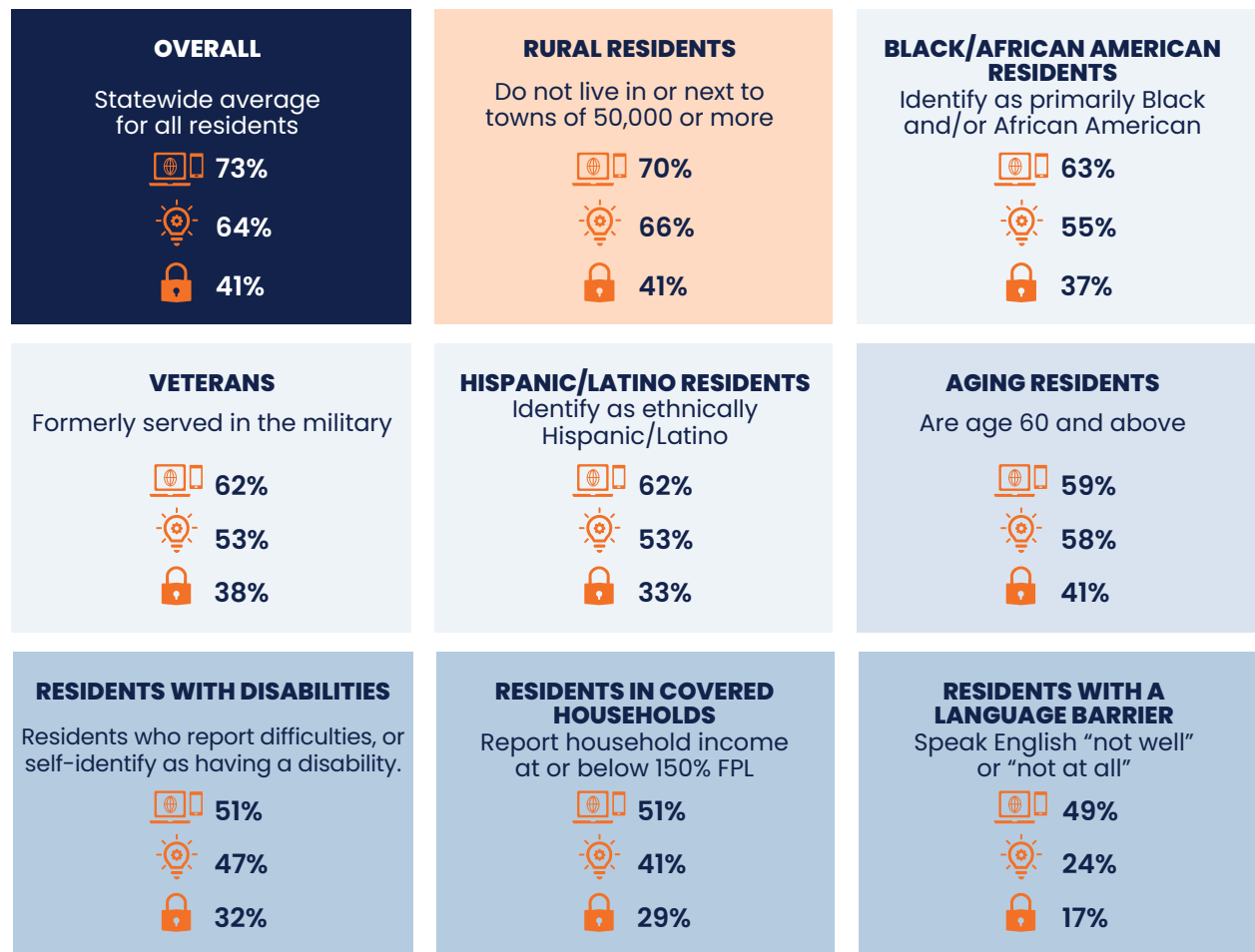
Residents said they could complete at least 5 of 6 key tasks without help



DIGITAL SECURITY BENCHMARK

Residents are very or fairly familiar with all key security concepts

The digital equity team collected benchmark scores for each covered population. Those with lower percentages meeting benchmarks face greater barriers to digital equity. The order is based on the Digital Connection Benchmark Score, the most reliable and replicable benchmark, which is based on U.S. Census data.



CURRENTLY INCARCERATED RESIDENTS

Incarcerated in a state correctional facility



0% of Currently Incarcerated Residents meet the Digital Connection Benchmark due to facility policies.



Currently Incarcerated Residents did not receive the resident survey, but recently incarcerated focus group members say they lack digital skills and digital security training.

For details on the resources in place and barriers to technology access that Connecticut residents face, see **Section 3: Assets and Needs**.

Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

The work and mission of DAS's Commission for Educational Technology have been grounded in achieving digital equity for the past 25 years. The Commission members as well as State agencies and partners helped streamline collaboration and stakeholder engagement even before DAS received funds to develop this plan. Outreach to support digital equity efforts fall into three phases:

Stage 1 Core, Partner, and Public Outreach

Recruitment of Core Planning Team members (subject-matter experts); discovery through Agency and community partners; insights through focus groups, surveys, and community outreach events.

Stage 2 Public Comment

In-person and online events to enable all residents and partner organizations to provide feedback on the draft Digital Equity Plan.

Stage 3 Implementation

Leveraging the power of regional conveners to collect input through trusted local partners to help bring about the goals of the Digital Equity Plan.

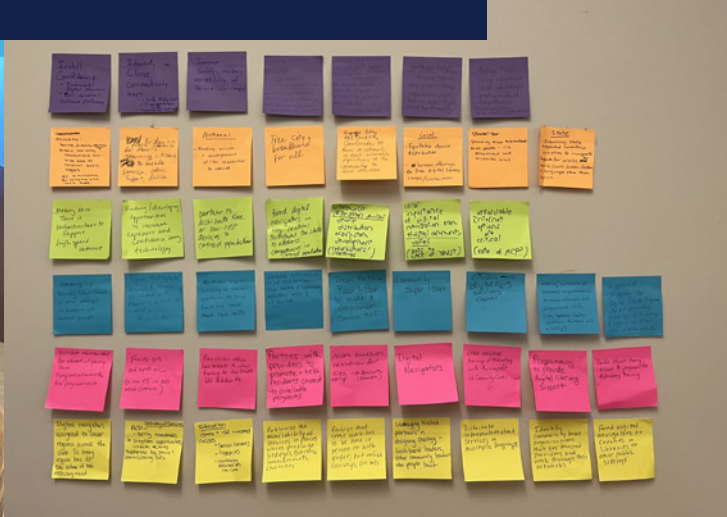
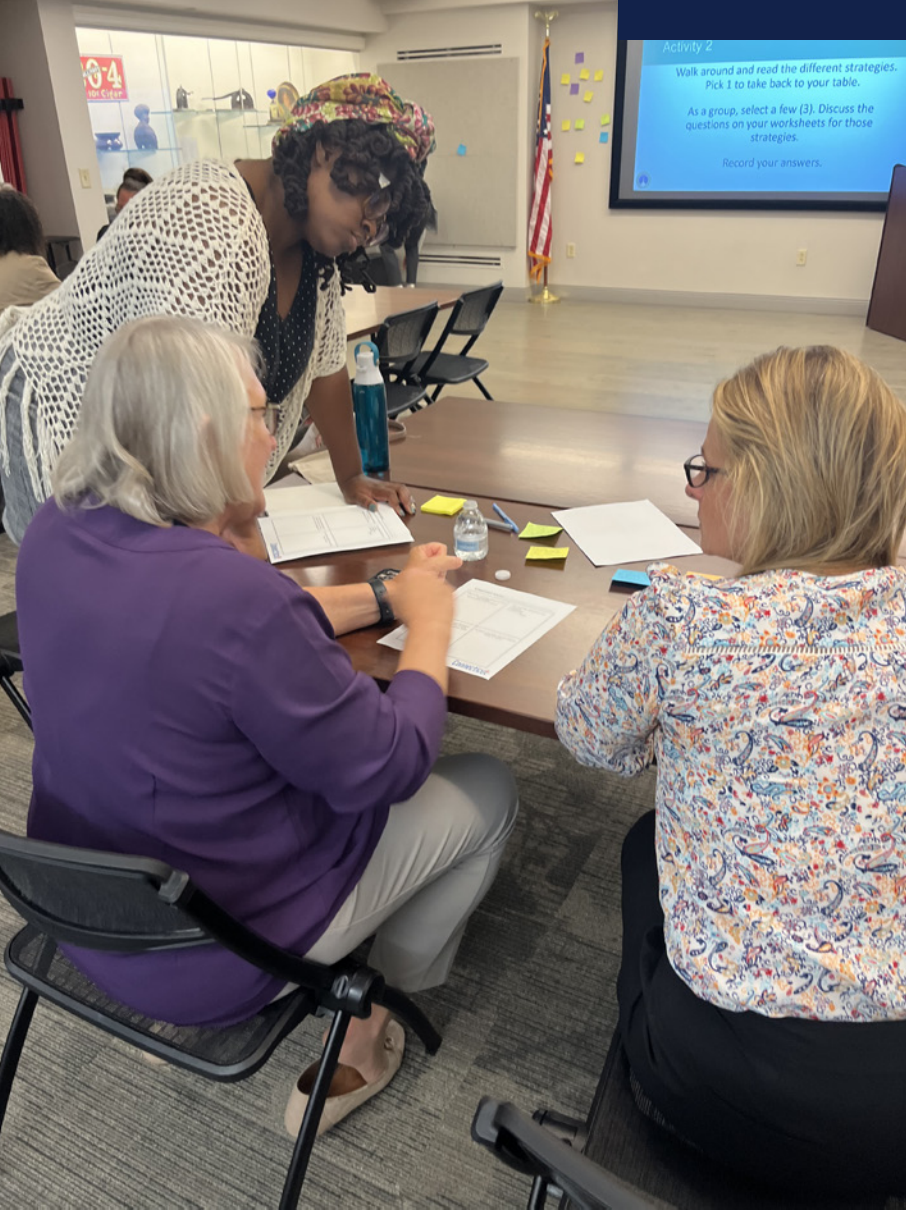
For the complete list of partners and outreach activities, see **Section 4: Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement.**

Implementation

Connecticut: Everyone Connected, the State's five-year Digital Equity Plan, establishes goals that leverage and expand existing efforts and directly address the needs that residents face:

1. Promote Development of Digital Skills and Technical Support Programs
2. Increase Public Awareness of Digital Equity Resources
3. Ensure Residents Have Affordable Options for Getting Online that Meet Their Needs
4. Support Development of Accessible and Inclusive Digital Government at the State and Local Levels
5. Support High-Speed Broadband Infrastructure Buildout
6. Foster Ongoing Learning About Digital Equity Best Practices

The Plan begins and ends with residents. The deployment of broadband and computers remains an essential condition to expanding technology access, and improving lives depends on awareness, trust, and relationships. The Connecticut Plan will align with State and local initiatives to accomplish these goals. And while the process of working toward digital equity is never "complete" — as new technologies emerge and Connecticut welcomes new residents of all ages — efforts over the next five years will establish a sustainable framework that helps ensure everyone in our state can benefit from life-enhancing digital tools and services. For more details on the goals above, including a detailed timeline, see Section 5: Implementation.



WE ARE BETTER
**WHEN WE ARE
CONNECTED**

