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Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program

**Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)**

Welcome

Mark Raymond

**State Chief Information Officer and
Chair, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology**



Digital Equity Program Overview

Graham Fishell

National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)



Digital Equity Act: Three Programs

Funding pool
\$2.75B

Three programs that provide funding to promote digital inclusion and advance equity for all. They aim to ensure that all communities can access and use affordable, reliable high-speed Internet to meet their needs and improve their lives.

PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTS

The Digital Equity Act created three programs:

State Planning

- \$60M formula funding program to develop digital equity plans

State Capacity

- \$1.44B formula funding program to implement plans & promote digital inclusion

Competitive

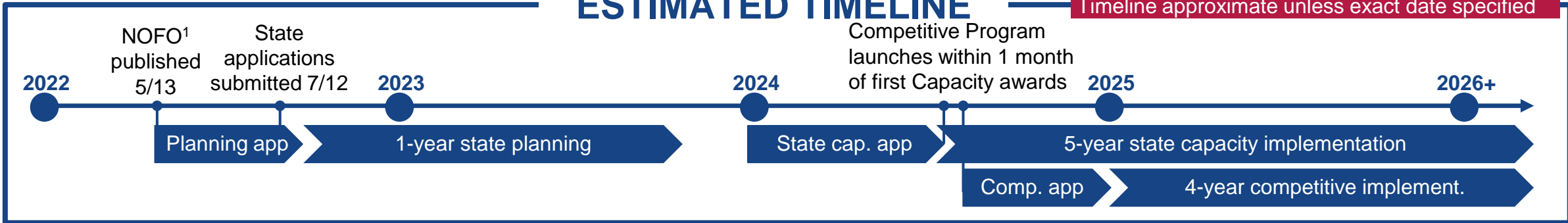
- \$1.25B to implement digital equity and inclusion activities

Example eligible uses of funds across three programs include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Developing digital equity plans; states must develop a plan to be eligible for state capacity grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Making awards to other entities to help make digital equity plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Improving accessibility and inclusivity of public resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Implementing digital equity plans and related activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Providing digital literacy and digital skills education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☆ Facilitating the adoption of high-speed Internet

ESTIMATED TIMELINE

Timeline approximate unless exact date specified



1. Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), [available here](#)

Digital Equity in Connecticut

Doug Casey

Executive Director

Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology





Digital Equity

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).

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

Digital Equity Components



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

CONNECTICUT: **EVERYONE CONNECTED**

Connecticut's Digital Equity Plan

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.

OVERALL

Statewide average for all residents

 73%

 64%

 41%

RURAL RESIDENTS

Do not live in or next to towns of 50,000 or more

 70%

 66%

 41%

BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN RESIDENTS

Identify as primarily Black and/or African American

 63%

 55%

 37%

VETERANS

Formerly served in the military

 62%

 53%

 38%

HISPANIC/LATINO RESIDENTS

Identify as ethnically Hispanic/Latino

 62%

 53%

 33%

AGING RESIDENTS

Are age 60 and above

 59%

 58%

 41%

RESIDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Residents who report difficulties, or self-identify as having a disability.

 51%

 47%

 32%

RESIDENTS IN COVERED HOUSEHOLDS

Report household income at or below 150% FPL

 51%

 41%

 29%

RESIDENTS WITH A LANGUAGE BARRIER

Speak English "not well" or "not at all"

 49%

 24%

 17%

CURRENTLY INCARCERATED RESIDENTS

Incarcerated in a state correctional facility

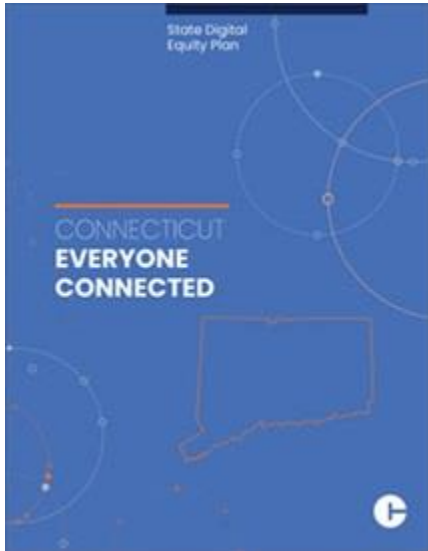


0% of Currently Incarcerated Residents meet the Digital Connection Benchmark due to facility policies.



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

State Digital Equity Plan Objectives



www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity



Promote Development of Digital Skills and Technical Support Programs



Increase Public Awareness of Digital Equity Resources



Ensure Residents Have Affordable Options for Getting Online that Meet Their Needs



Support Development of Accessible and Inclusive Digital Government at the State and Local Levels



Support High-Speed Broadband Infrastructure Buildout



Foster Ongoing Learning About Digital Equity Best Practices

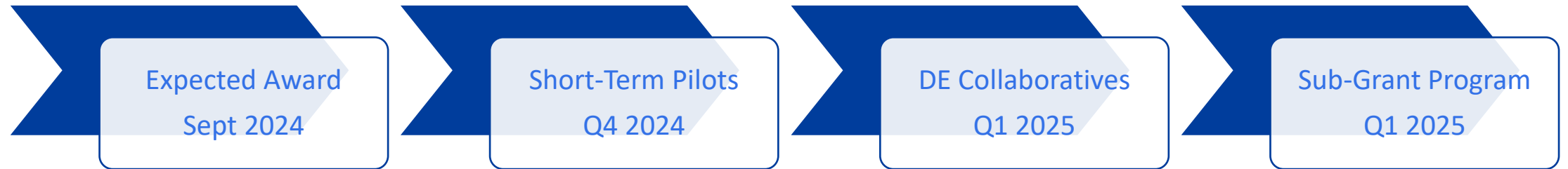
Digital Equity Plan Projects

- Conduct Digital Navigator Pilots
- Launch Digital Navigator Sub-Grant Program
- Establish Regional Digital Equity Collaboratives
- Create/Curate Common Digital Skills Curriculum
- Launch Statewide Digital Equity “Asset Map”



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General Timing



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Competitive Grant Opportunities

- Areas That Complement and DO NOT Duplicate Elements of the State Digital Equity Plan
- For Example:
 - Sustainable Device Donation and Distribution
 - Public Computer Facilities



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Digital Equity Competitive Program

Graham Fishell

Federal Program Officer

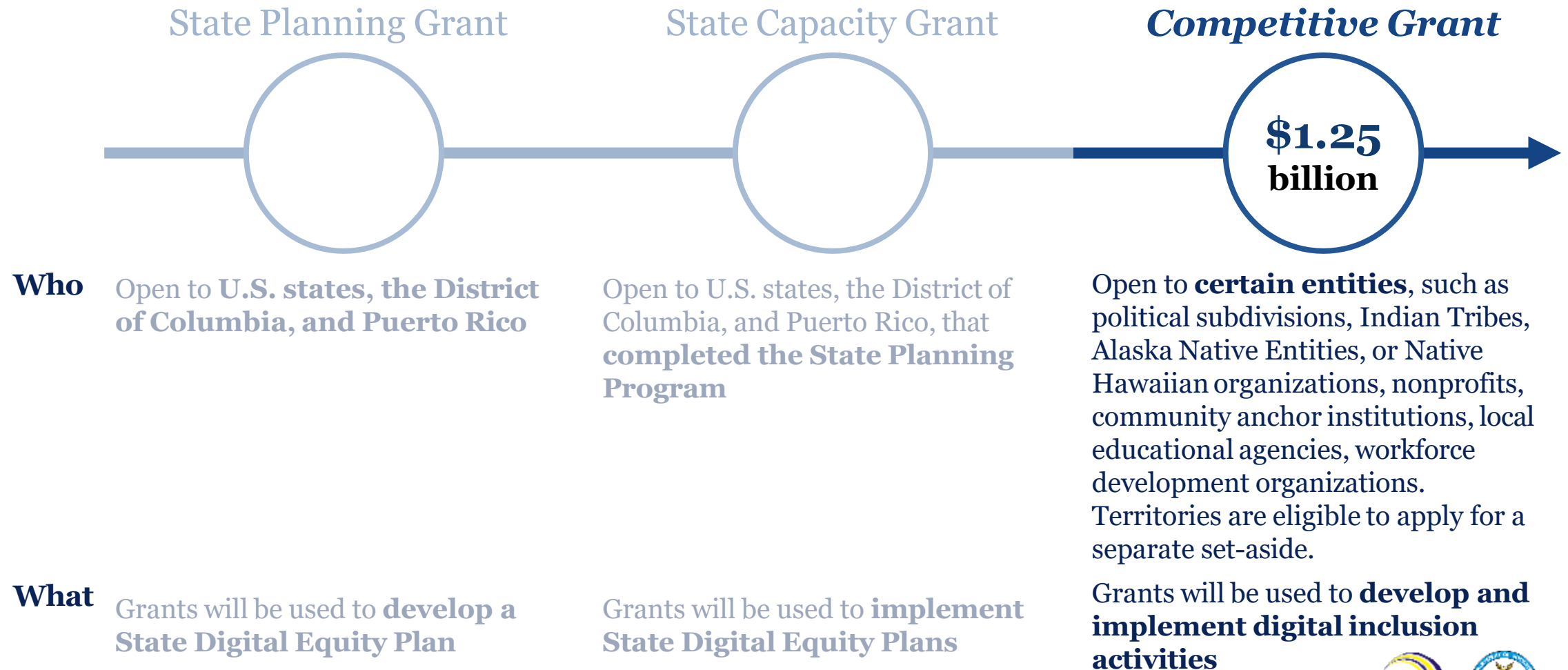
National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)



The Digital Equity Act & the Competitive Grant Program



The Competitive Grant Program is the third digital equity funding opportunity authorized by the Digital Equity Act.



Competitive Grant Program: Covered Populations



The Competitive Grant Program seeks to serve the Covered Populations as defined in the Digital Equity Act (**47 U.S.C. §1721(8)**). Awards will *focus on addressing* the needs of the Covered Populations ***not met*** by the Capacity Grant Program.



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



Individuals with **disabilities**



Aging individuals



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



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**

Note: For more information on the Capacity Grant Program and to view the Capacity Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity and Applicant resources, visit: broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-programs/Digital_Equity_Capacity_Grant_Program.



What is the Purpose of the Competitive Grant Program?

The purpose of the Competitive Grant Program is to **achieve** digital equity, **promote** digital inclusion activities, and **spur greater adoption of broadband** among **Covered Populations**. The program aims to make progress against several categories of social and economic goals including:



Principles of the Competitive Grant Program

NTIA seeks applications for programs and activities that ***address gaps in the implementation*** of State Digital Equity Plans, will ***supplement or further advance*** State Digital Equity Plans and/or proposals that ***address barriers that were not identified*** in the current State Digital Equity Plans.

NTIA **encourages** proposals that demonstrate a **broad partnership of entities** with the ability to **administer significant resources** and address the varied concerns of the Covered Populations.

Partnerships should demonstrate:



The ability to administer resources

AND










Address the varied concerns of the Covered Populations

NTIA encourages innovative approaches that transcend existing Digital Equity programs.

Eligible Applicants: Organizational Entities



The NOFO identifies eligible entities in Section III.A. Entities must have a track record of administering resources and be prepared to support the goals of the Digital Equity Act through funded activities. Eligible Entities are asked to self-identify as one of the applicant entity types listed below:

-  Political Subdivision, Agency, Instrumentality
-  An Indian Tribe, Alaska Native Entity, Native Hawaiian Organization
-  Foundation, Corporation, Institution, or Association
-  Community Anchor Institution
-  Local Education Agency
-  Entity that Carries Out Workforce Development Program
-  Partnership Between Any of the Entities Described Above

Clarifications

Agencies of a State includes those responsible for administering or supervising adult education, literacy activities, or providing public housing

Foundation, Corporations, etc. must be a not-for-profit entity and not a school

U.S. Territories may ONLY apply for the territorial set aside. Native Entities are also eligible to participate in the Native Entity set aside.



Allowable Activities

An Eligible Entity or U.S. Territory to which a Competitive Grant is awarded must use the grant funds to support not less than 1 of the following activities:



Digital Inclusion Activities



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



Adoption of Broadband



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



Upgrade Public Access Centers



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



Implement Training Programs



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



Make Available Equipment



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.



In the spirit of innovative approaches that transcend existing Digital Equity programs, *applicants may also undertake any other project or activity that the Assistant Secretary finds to be consistent with the purposes for which the Program is established.*

Competitive Funding Pool



NTIA expects to make individual Competitive Grant Program awards to Eligible Entities, including Native Entities, within a range of \$5,000,000 and \$12,000,000.



Funding Range

\$5,000,000 to \$12,000,000

- Eligible Entities requesting award amounts outside that range **must explain** why their application falls **below/above this range**.



Remaining Funds

- NTIA will issue one or more additional NOFOs under the DE Competitive Program to issue remaining funds



Performance Measurement and Evaluation



Recipients and subrecipients are required to incorporate program measurement and evaluation activities as a part of program design and implementation. Information collected should include, but is not limited to:

Societal and Economic Goals Being Addressed

For each activity or intervention, the grant recipient must **explain** how the activity or intervention facilitates the purpose of the Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program, specifically by promoting one or more of the following:

- Economic stability including workforce development and employment opportunities
- Education Access
- Health care access
- Social and civic engagement
- Community access to the benefits of Internet technology

Analysis of Program Effectiveness

The grant recipient **must submit** an overall assessment of the effectiveness of the programs along with results, protocols, and instruments used to collect data:

- Include whether the intended objectives were accomplished
- Include whether the program resulted in measurable changes in participants from Covered Populations
- Provide data demonstrating progress toward the goals and objectives caused by the project or activity as opposed to other causes
- Show how efficiently the program achieved its goals



Performance Measurement and Evaluation Metrics



Recipients and subrecipients are required to incorporate program measurement and evaluation activities as a part of program design and implementation. It is recommended that applicants review State Digital Equity Plans for common metrics. Information collected should include, but is not limited to:



**Covered
Populations**

Clearly *identify* the Covered Population or Covered Populations being served

***Report* the number of individuals that belong to each Covered Population being served**



**Individuals
Served**

***Report the total* number of individuals being served**



**Anecdotal/
Personal
Experiences**

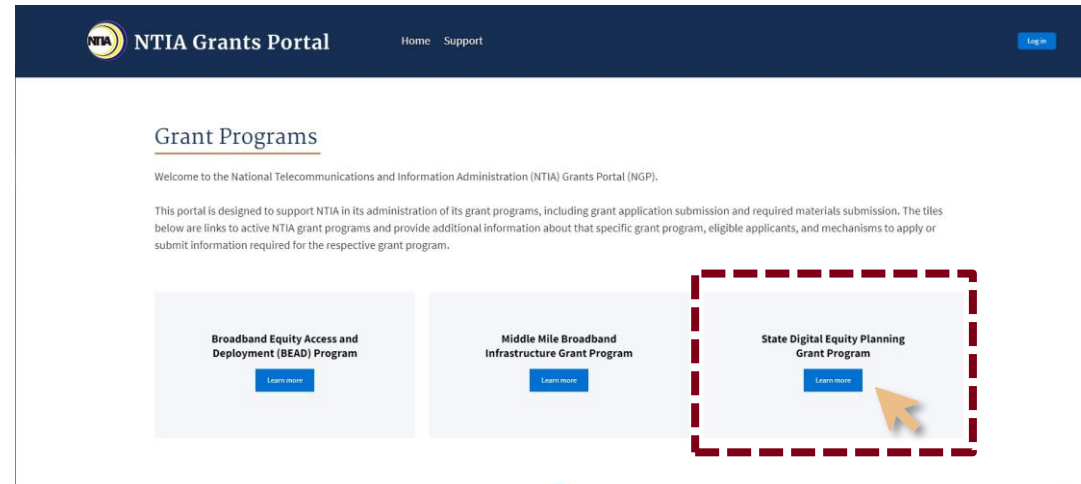
***Collect and report* anecdotal/personal testimonies that demonstrate the positive experiences generated through the program**



How to Apply for the Grant



The Competitive Grant Program has forms and requirements that are unique to the program and require special attention.



The NTIA Grants Portal can be accessed at <https://grants.ntia.gov>. From the Grant Programs page, click the Learn More button under “Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program (2024)” to reach the home page. Log in with your account or create an account if you don’t have one. Additional instructions can be found in the Application Guidance.

****NOTE: The Application Portal will open: August 14, 2024****

Applicants must have an active SAM.gov account and UEI to register for access to the portal.



Next Steps



Applicants for the Competitive Grant Program can prepare for application submission by following the steps outlined below:

- ① Review NOFO
- ② Review Eligibility Information
- ③ Register for SAM.gov or check your registration
- ④ Engage Stakeholders
- ⑤ Identify Partnerships
- ⑥ Review State DE Plans
- ⑦ Register for the Competitive Application Webinar
- ⑧ Review the Application Guidance
- ⑨ Prepare Application Materials
- ⑩ Submit application in the Grants Portal



Key Dates Reminder



Please note the following key dates and deadlines coming up for the Competitive Grant Program.

Application Due Dates



Complete applications from Eligible Entities, including Native Entities, must be received by the NTIA application portal no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on **September 23, 2024**. (NOFO Section IV.F)

Complete applications from U.S. Territories must be received by the NTIA application portal no later than 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time (ET) on **October 22, 2024**. (NOFO Executive Summary Section M)

Issuing Awards



NTIA expects to complete its review, select successful applicants, and begin award processing by Winter 2024. NTIA may, subject to NIST Grants Office Approval, announce awards made under the Competitive Grant Program on a rolling basis. (NOFO Section IV.F)

Period of Performance



Except for measurement and evaluation activities required under the Digital Equity Act and the NOFO, grant recipients must expend the grant amounts within four (4) years after the date on which the entity is awarded the grant. **No extensions to the four-year Period of Performance or the one-year evaluation period will be granted.** (NOFO Section II.B)



Digital Equity Resources

Competitive Grant Program

- InternetforAll.gov/program/digital-equity-act-programs
- NOFO, recorded presentations, slides, technical guidance

Connecticut Digital Equity Plan

- www.CT.gov/DigitalEquity
- State plans and updates