

Advancing Digital Equity for All:



OFFICE OF
Educational Technology

*Community-Based Recommendations
for Developing Effective Digital Equity
Plans to Close the Digital Divide
and Enable
Technology-Empowered
Learning*





OFFICE OF Educational Technology

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology (OET) develops national educational technology policy and establishes the vision for how technology can be used to transform teaching and learning and how to ***make everywhere, all-the-time learning possible*** for early learners through K-12, higher education, and adult education.

Goals

- Review Policy Context
- Highlight findings from *Advancing Digital Equity for All*
- Consider Education's Role in Digital Equity
- Share Suggested Action Steps and Resources



Policy Context

- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) includes \$65B in broadband investments.
- The BIL includes the Digital Equity Act programs, administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce (NTIA).
- The first part of the Digital Equity Act funds the development of state digital equity plans.



Digital Equity Act Covered Populations

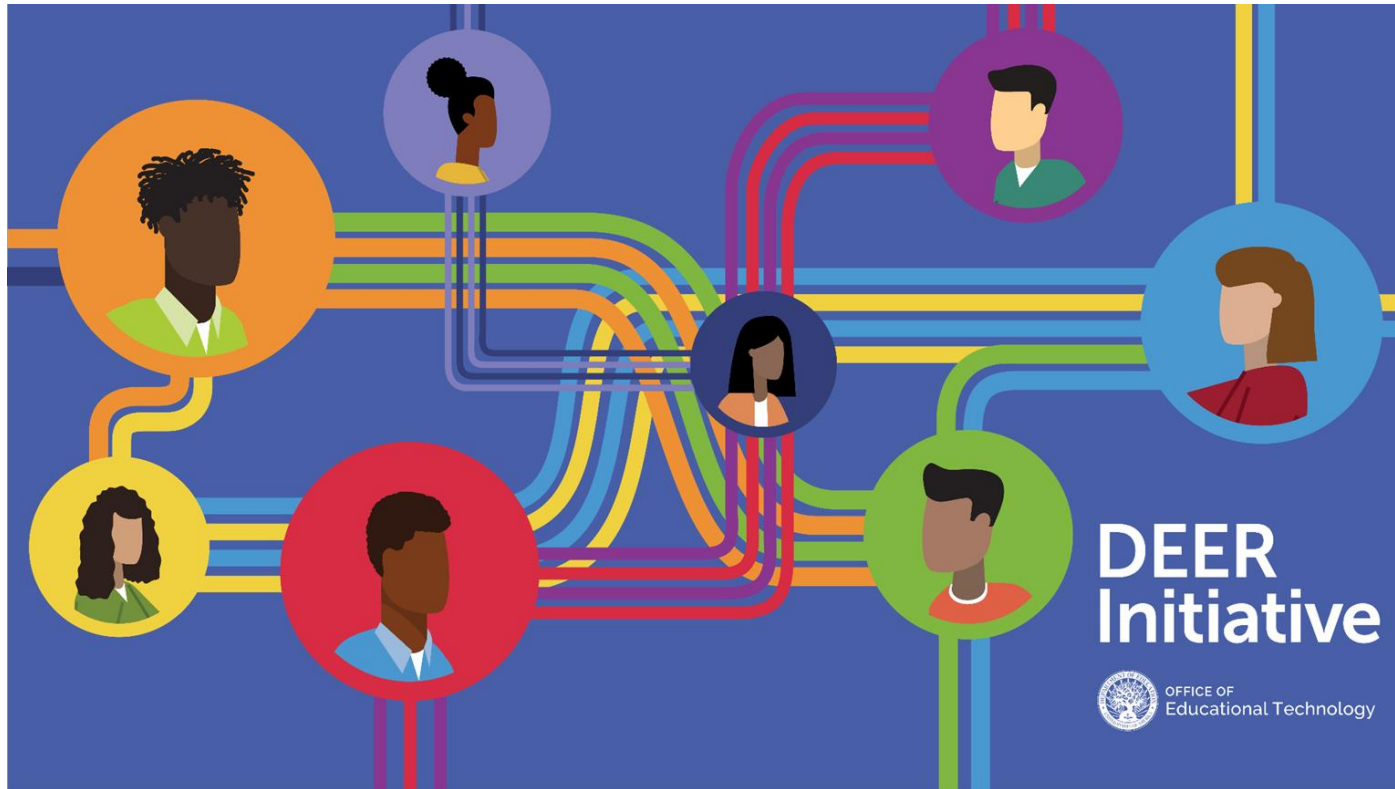
- Individuals who live in **covered households** (household income is not more than 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level)
- **Aging individuals**
- **Incarcerated individuals**, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility
- **Veterans**
- **Individuals with disabilities**
- **Individuals with a language barrier**, e.g., English learners and individuals with low levels of literacy
- Individuals who are **members of a racial or ethnic minority group**
- Individuals who primarily **reside in a rural area**



Key Questions for Education

- What is the U.S. Department of Education's role in maximizing the impact of the \$65B broadband package in the BIL?
- How can we increase access for learners, families, educators, and communities furthest from digital opportunities?
- What role can **leaders like you** play in helping ensure that state digital equity plans address the needs and assets of the education sector?





The DEER Initiative aims to identify barriers that learner communities face in adopting reliable, high-speed internet and technology tools for learning, recommend strategies that leaders can leverage to navigate these barriers, amplify examples of solutions, and spur community action and commitment to close the digital divide.

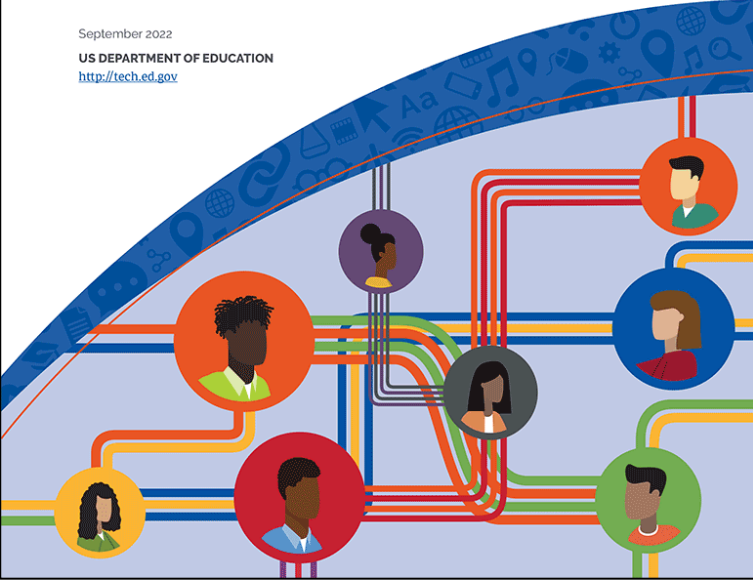
tech.ed.gov/DEER



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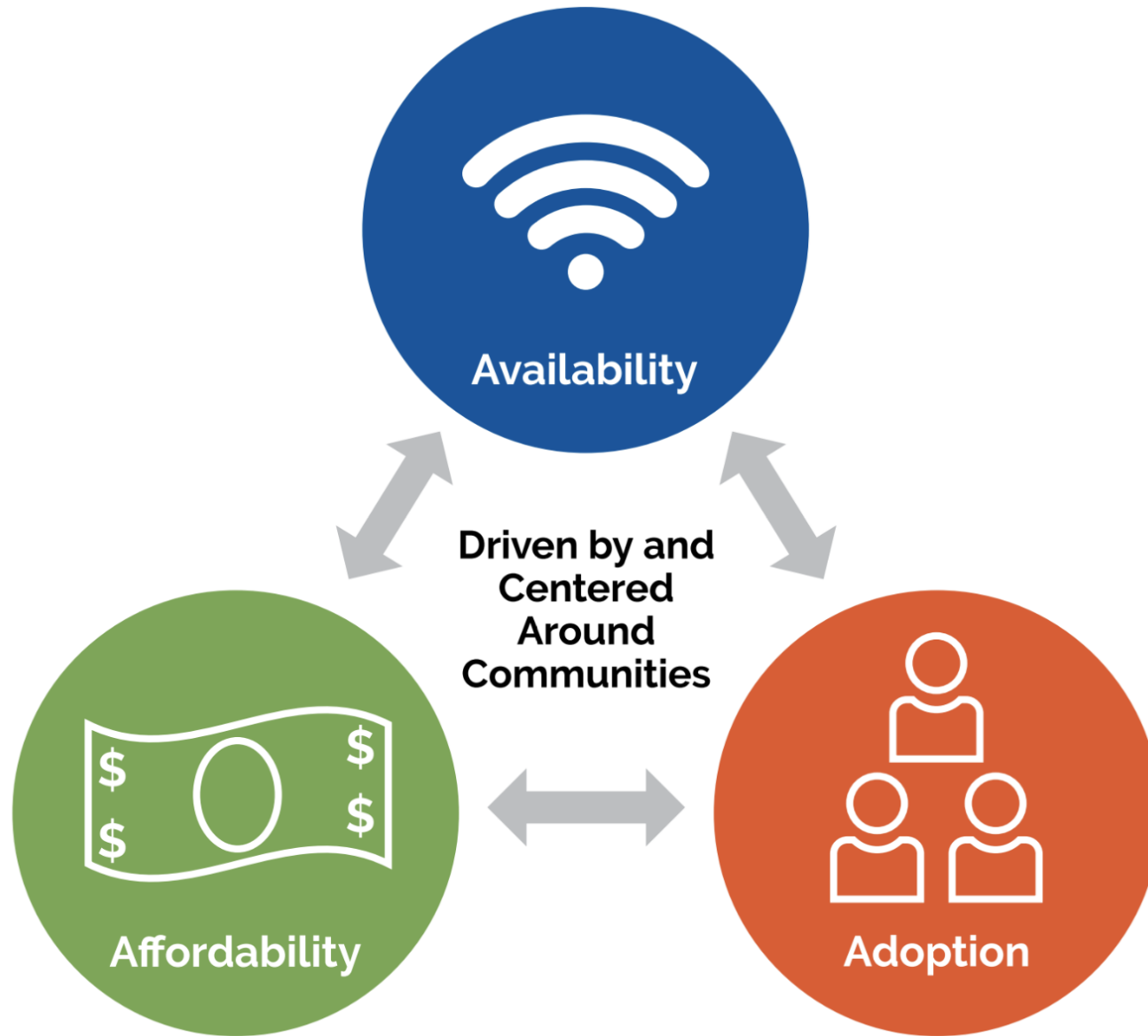


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Adoption Strategies

- Co-creating solutions with communities
- Inclusive technical support efforts
- Building digital literacy skills & digital resilience
- Leveraging trusted community assets
- Regular learning and feedback cycles

For examples, visit the OET Story Engine:

https://tech.ed.gov/stories/story_tag/digital-equity/



How Can the Education Sector Contribute at the Local Level? (slide 1 of 3)

- Share information about the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** with educators, learners, families, caregivers, and communities.
- Check out OET's ACP outreach toolkit: tech.ed.gov/ACP.
- ED recently launched the Online For All Campaign with additional resources: onlineforall.org.



How Can the Education Sector Contribute at the Local Level? (slide 2 of 3)

- **Reflect** on barriers and strategies included in OET's guidance resource (tech.ed.gov/deer) and how they relate to the communities your organization or agency serves.
- Keep up to speed on **stakeholder engagement efforts** (e.g., surveys, community meetings, focus groups). See OET's latest blogs (medium.com/@OfficeofEdTech/list/digital-equity-f445a49e7b1f)



How Can the Education Sector Contribute at the Local Level? (slide 3 of 3)

- If you're a local leader, **check with your contacts at the state level** (e.g., SEAs) to discuss how you can best support their ongoing efforts.
- Consider how education can enhance the **sustainability** of digital equity efforts. Refer to OET's Dear Colleague Letter (tech.ed.gov/federal-funding-dear-colleague-letter/), which discusses how to leverage federal funding for teaching and learning with technology.



How Can the Education Sector Contribute at the State Level?

- Find out about your state's **NTIA FPO** and the **state broadband office** (internetforall.gov/interactive-map).
- **Consider your organization's/agency's specific contributions** and how you can communicate this value-add through a unified voice.
- Digital equity plans are required to undergo a **30-day public comment period**. When announced, participate to further communicate the needs of learners.



Resources

- OET *Advancing Digital Equity for All*: tech.ed.gov/DEER
- OET Blogs on State Examples and Outreach Opportunities: medium.com/@OfficeofEdTech/list/digital-equity-f445a49e7b1f
- OET Digital Equity Stories: tech.ed.gov/stories/story_tag/digital-equity/
- OET Dear Colleague Letter: tech.ed.gov/federal-funding-dear-colleague-letter/
- NTIA Digital Equity Act Programs: internetforall.gov/program/digital-equity-act-programs
- InternetForAll Map: internetforall.gov/interactive-map
- State Digital Equity Plan Public Comments: broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/public-notice-posting-state-and-territory-bead-and-digital-equity-plansproposals
- Online For All Campaign: onlineforall.org



What role can **you** play in helping ensure that state digital equity plans address the needs of all learners?



Digital Equity: Accessibility

- Learners with disabilities are a population impacted by digital divides in many ways
 - Availability: How can you ensure that learners with disabilities have access to broadband and devices that they require to learn and communicate?
 - Affordability: How can you connect learners to affordable broadband and accessible technology in school and at home?
 - Adoption: How can you train learners, educators and families to use and implement the accessible technologies?



Defining Accessibility

A person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to **acquire** the same information, **engage** in the same interactions, and **enjoy** the same services as a person without a disability, in an equally **effective and equally integrated manner**, with substantially equivalent ease of use. (Source: [Joint Letter US Department of Justice and US Department of Education, June 29, 2010](#) & [CAST](#))

In order for learners to meaningfully participate in their education, all learners must be able to engage with their educational materials.

How can state leaders improve accessibility? (slide 1 of 2)

1. Provide trainings and resources to your staff and educators

- A. Office for Civil Rights (OCR) [digital accessibility video series](#)
- B. Connect your educators with your state's [Assistive Technology Center](#). States receive funding to provide free technical assistance.
- C. Partner with CAST's National Center on Accessible Educational Materials for Learning ([AEM Center](#)) to receive technical assistance on the procurement, implementation and use of accessible educational materials.
- D. Disseminate the [EdTech for All Webinar Series](#) to equip educators with evidence-based ed tech tools to implement with those students who have or do not have disabilities with the goal of improving student outcomes.

How can state leaders improve accessibility? (slide 2 of 2)

2. Review and adjust your accessibility inclusive culture and policies

- A. Check out these free federal resources curated by [OET](#) and [OSERS](#) on accessibility policies, accommodations, digital materials development and more.
- B. Watch the OET & OSERS Webinar [Implementing Accessibility: Learning from the South Carolina Department of Education](#)
- C. Look out for Department of Education guidance on Assistive Technology

Thank you!

