

# The Digital Equity Act of 2021

## The Problem: Too many Americans lack the skills and technology needed to effectively use the internet and the tools and services it has to offer

Increasingly, Americans require a broadband internet connection to live, work, and interact. Yet far too many individuals, many of whom are members of historically overlooked and underserved communities, lack the skills, technologies, and support needed to take advantage of the opportunities made available by a reliable broadband connection.<sup>1</sup> Absent help, they are at risk of being left behind.

Expanding access to broadband is necessary but is far from sufficient. The Federal Government must work towards ensuring “all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy”—a principle called “digital equity.”<sup>2</sup>

## The Solution: The Digital Equity Act of 2021

The Digital Equity Act of 2021 aims to address these gaps by promoting a diverse array of digital inclusion projects at the state and local level. These projects may range from providing digital literacy and digital skills education to low-income populations, improving the online accessibility of social services for individuals with disabilities, or more accurately measuring broadband access and adoption in rural communities.

The Digital Equity Act of 2021 establishes two grant programs to be administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to promote digital equity nationwide:

- *Building Capacity within States through Formula Grants:* The Digital Equity Act of 2021 creates an annual \$125 million formula grant program for all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to fund the creation and implementation of comprehensive digital equity plans in each State
- *Spurring Targeted Action through Competitive Grants:* The Digital Equity Act of 2021 creates an annual \$125 million competitive grant program to support digital inclusion projects undertaken by individual groups, coalitions, and/or communities of interest
- *Supporting Research and Evidence-Based Policymaking:* The Digital Equity Act of 2021 tasks NTIA with evaluating digital inclusion projects and providing policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels with detailed information about which projects are most effective

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<sup>1</sup> National Telecommunications and Information Administration. (2018, June 06). *Digital Nation Data Explorer*. Retrieved January 14, 2019, from (<https://www.ntia.doc.gov/data/digital-nation-data-explorer#sel=internetUser&demo=&pc=prop&disp=chart>)

<sup>2</sup> National Digital Inclusion Alliance: Definitions. (n.d.). Retrieved January 14, 2019, from <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/>