

ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

ACF Office of Regional Operations (ORO)

Digital Inclusion Resources

For State and Tribal Human Service Leaders

October 7, 2020



When COVID 19 hit we had to buy a laptop, tablet, and SD cards so that the kids could continue with schooling. But they weren't compatible with their learning apps. So we had to improvise. Each time it cost more and more, and it put us into debt.

Dreamishia Guerrero, ACF program participant in Southern Colorado

COVID-19 Response Exposes a New Human Services Challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic is drastically changing how human services programs are delivered and how families and children are accessing resources and participating in the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) programs. The response requires a [Whole Family Approach](#) and human services agencies are quickly adapting; switching to virtual platforms to interact with participants, and developing innovative ways to accomplish critical tasks digitally. This new dynamic has elevated awareness of significant gaps in digital access, affordability and literacy for families in both rural and urban communities across the country, as not all families are reached digitally.

Families in Rural & Urban Communities Are Left Behind

A 2020 report from the FCC found that 18 million people, including 7 million children, lack internet access. Approximately 5.2% of Americans do not have internet access at broadband speeds, including 20.7% of rural Americans and 1.5% of Americans in urban areas.ⁱ Where there is broadband access, not everyone is online. Nationally, just 80.4% of households have a home broadband subscriptionⁱⁱ and approximately 15-16 million students' lack access to either an internet connection, a broadband enabled device, or both.ⁱⁱⁱ Among those who do have access, there are remaining gaps in digital literacy that may be needed to benefit from ever more critical human services, such as child care, economic or employment supports.

Digital Inclusion Requires Human Services Leadership

While many human services leaders have responded to the pandemic with innovative approaches to providing tele-human-services, individuals and families without remote or online services will be left behind until gaps in digital inclusion are addressed. The increasing significance of digital access and literacy in our personal and professional lives will play a major role in the economic resilience of individuals through this pandemic, as well as economic mobility and recovery for families and communities. Simply understanding the challenge of digital inclusion is a first step, but addressing families' access to digital resources requires that human service leaders are actively engaged in collaborative interagency digital inclusion efforts.

Digital Inclusion Resources

The Office of Regional Operations (ORO) [prioritizes putting families at the center](#) of health and human services to increase economic mobility, family self-sufficiency, and employment. ORO compiled this document in response to the pressing need for connectivity, devices, internet access and technical assistance so that more families have access to digital resources. However, it is not intended to be a comprehensive resource. Funding streams and opportunities from several federal agencies are highlighted below, as well as information to learn more about digital inclusion such as policy and data briefs from both federal agencies and external organizations.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DIGITAL INCLUSION

Strategies, Research & Innovation

The HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation produced briefs that aim to assist human services agencies working to scale-up virtual case management and other tele-human services:

- [Virtual Case Management Considerations and Resources for Human Services Programs](#)
- [Persons in Low-Income Households Have Less Access to Internet Services](#)
- [Improving Human Services Using Virtual Technical Assistance: Research Brief](#)

The [Pew Broadband Research Initiative](#) highlights promising practices in addressing gaps in connectivity and broadband access, including through these two resources:

- A [State Broadband Policy Explorer](#) provides an interactive visual of how states are addressing broadband gaps, and
- A [2020 Report](#) on How States are Expanding Broadband Access.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City published a report highlighting key considerations in addressing digital inclusion: [Disconnected: Seven Lessons on Fixing the Digital Divide](#).

The National Digital Inclusion Alliance has a number of resources available related to broadband and technology access, including resources related to COVID-19 at their website: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/>

Common Sense Media and BCG released a report on [Closing the K-12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning](#) and Common Sense Media hosts an [interactive webpage](#) highlighting data on the digital divide by state.

Funding Opportunities & Federal Data

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration has a comprehensive and detailed guide to federal funding opportunities for broadband here: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/new-fund-searcha>

The Federal Communications Commission publishes broadband resources here: <https://www.fcc.gov/general/broadband>, including their [annual Broadband Deployment Reports](#) and an [interactive Broadband Deployment map](#) of the United States.

FEDERAL FUNDING RESOURCES FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION

Funding for different types of digital access is available through several federal agencies (highlighted in the matrix below). Two main funding categories include access to broadband (internet services) or access to equipment/devices. Many federal funding streams provide funds for both of these categories. (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE). *Broadband Access Resources*, PDF file.2020)

<https://youth.gov/covid-coronavirus-resources/broadband-access>.

The **BROADBAND** and **EQUIPMENT** and **DEVICES** categories may include services such as:

Broadband



- Broadband Services
- Voice and Data Services
- Data Transmission Services
- Internet Access
- Internal Connections

Equipment and Devices



- Network Equipment (i.e., routers, wireless controller systems, cabling, software, etc.)
- Distance Learning, Employment and Service Access Equipment (i.e., laptops, tablets)

| Category | Program | Summary | Website | Additional Info |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| <p>US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION</p> | <p>CARES Act Project SERV</p> | <p>Congress awarded \$100 million for Project SERV under the CARES Act to respond to COVID-19 disruptions to the learning environment in schools and postsecondary institutions. ^{iv}</p> <p>Note: Please check the website for updates</p> | <p>https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/cares-act-project-serv/</p> <p>https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/bureau-of-indian-education/</p> | <p>As part of the CARES Act’s Education Stabilization Fund, the Department is required to set aside one-half of 1% of the \$30.75 billion (\$153,750,000) for programs operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Education, in consultation with the Secretary of Interior.</p> |
| | <p>FCC E-Rate Program</p> | <p>The E-Rate Program offers up to 90% discounts on eligible data transmission services, internet access, internal connections, and managed internal broadband services and equipment. ^{iv}</p> <p>Second FY2020 Filing window:</p> <p>Opening Date: 9/21/2020 Closing Date: 10/16/2020</p> | <p>https://www.usac.org/e-rate/get-started/</p> | <p>School Residential Facilities – starting in FY2011, the following school residential facilities became eligible for discounts: Schools on Tribal lands; Schools that serve children with physical, cognitive, and behavioral disabilities; Schools that serve children with medical needs; Juvenile justice schools, where eligible; and Schools with 35 percent or more students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).</p> |
| | <p>U.S. Department of Education – Impact Aid Program</p> | <p>Impact Aid funds are available for all general fund purposes and can be expended for any purpose, similar to local revenue for education. Funds be used to support connectivity (i.e., broadband infrastructure and adoption), digital skills training, and mobile hotspots (including data plans). ^{iv}</p> <p>Note: Please check the website for updates</p> | <p>https://impactaid.ed.gov/</p> <p>https://impactaid.ed.gov/legislation/</p> | <p>Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 222 (34 CFR 222). Subpart G—Special Provisions for Local Educational Agencies That Claim Children Residing on Indian Lands</p> |

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| | | <p>The Department of Education has multiple programs, similar to the Impact Aid Program, where funds could be used to support broadband access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promise Neighborhoods b. Rural and Low-Income School Programs c. Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) Program d. Student Support and Academic Enrichment Program, Title IV, Part A | <p>All programs can be found at https://oese.ed.gov/archive/d/office-of-academic-improvement/ https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/rural-insular-native-achievement-programs/</p> | <p>Rural, Insular, and Native Achievement Programs (RINAP) provide financial support and technical assistance to improve the educational outcomes of students, particularly students in rural and geographically isolated areas.</p> |
| | Elementary and Secondary Relief Fund (ESSR) | <p>The U.S. Department of Education has allocated \$13.2 billion of CARES Act funds for K-12 schools. The Department will award grants to State educational agencies (SEAs) to provide local educational agencies (LEAs) to address the impact that COVID-19 has and continues to have on elementary and secondary schools across the nation.^{iv}</p> <p>Note: Please check the website for updates</p> | <p>https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/ https://oese.ed.gov/files/20/20/04/ESSER-Fund-State-Allocations-Table.pdf https://oese.ed.gov/files/20/20/05/ESSER-Fund-Frequently-Asked-Questions.pdf</p> | <p>The Bureau of Indian Education and the Outlying Areas are not eligible to receive ESSER formula funds. Congress provided a separate set aside in the Education Stabilization Fund to provide funds to those entities.</p> |
| BROADBAND for Individuals and Families | FCC Lifeline Program | <p>The Lifeline Program allows eligible consumers to receive a monthly benefit up to \$9.25 towards phone or internet services (and up to \$34.25 for those living on Tribal and Native lands).^{iv}</p> | <p>https://www.lifelinesupport.org/how-to-get-lifeline/</p> | <p>An individual can qualify for the Lifeline benefit if their income is 135% or less than the federal poverty guidelines, or if they participate in SNAP, Medicaid, or other federal programs.</p> |

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| | | Note: Eligibility determined on individual basis | | |
| | HUD ConnectHome USA | HUD, in partnership with the non-profit EveryoneOn, is able to offer free or \$9.95 home internet service by partnering with local Internet Service Providers. ^{iv} Note: Eligibility determined on individual basis | https://www.everyoneon.org/find-offers | |
| US DEPARTMENT OF LABOR | Department of Labor - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) | WIOA funds are administered through the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) of the Department of Labor. WIOA funds can be used to pay for devices and broadband internet service that will allow a participant to create or maintain a wireless connection for distance learning, etc., where such services are already allowable. ^{iv} Note: Must submit a State Plan for approval | https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa Division of Indian and Native American Programs (DINAP) Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/dinap | |
| US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE | U.S. Department of Commerce – Economic Adjustment Assistance Program (EAA) | Congress allocated \$1.5 billion of CARES Act funds for the EAA program. Allowable use of funds include the deployment of broadband for purposes including supporting telehealth and remote learning for job skills. ^{iv} Opening Date: 10/18/2019 Closing Date: 9/30/2022 | https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppld=321695 | Eligible Applicants: Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized) County governments Special district governments State governments Public and State controlled institutions of higher education City or township governments Nonprofits that do not have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education Private institutions of higher education. |

ⁱ Federal Communications Commission, “2020 Broadband Deployment Report”, June 9, 2020: <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2020-broadband-deployment-report>

ⁱⁱ American Community Survey

ⁱⁱⁱ Chandra, S., Chang, A., Day, L., Fazlullah, A., Liu, J., McBride, L., Mudalige, T., Weiss, D., (2020). Closing the K–12 Digital Divide in the Age of Distance Learning. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media. Boston, Massachusetts, Boston Consulting Group.

https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/pdfs/common_sense_media_report_final_7_1_3pm_web.pdf

^{iv} Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (**ASPE**). *Broadband Access Resources*, PDF file.2020) <https://youth.gov/covid-coronavirus-resources/broadband-access>.