

DELN of King County Feedback on State Digital Equity Plan

DELN of King County held 3 focus groups and solicited comments on the State Digital Equity plan. from our membership. We had 17 people from 16 different organizations attend the working groups and 4 more provided written comments.

The comments were shared with our membership through our listserv and submitted to the State Broadband office.

Section 1: Executive Summary

Section 1.2.2: Strategies p 11

Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy.

Activities:

- Build on lessons learned in Digital navigator programs to expand digital literacy programs
- Leverage Digital Navigator Program to expand community partnerships
- Build on partnership with OSPI

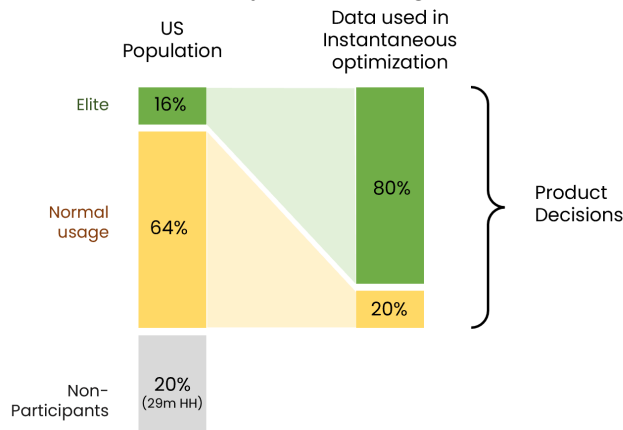
Our concern is the exclusive focus on digital navigator programs and OSPI. Digital Navigator programs are crucial in helping residents navigate and find services, but there needs to be a sustained commitment to working with community partners to provide intensive digital skills training, which is not highlighted in this summary.

Addition: build on partnerships with Community Based Organizations and other anchor institutions (e.g. libraries and Community and Technical Colleges) to expand digital equity access

Also, we share concerns with the exclusive focus in terms of the name “Digital Navigator.” I agree they are integral, however there are other models such as the Digital Steward programs we conduct that include key components of Digital Navigator and Digital Literacy programming, but also expand significantly that curricula to include hard technical skills and pathways to certifications and a workforce development focus. The Digital Stewards programs also focus on teaching community technology to anchor orgs and training them to create Digital Steward programs of their own

There should be policy that compel the BigTech companies to make their products & services more accessible and equitable and realize the full benefits of technology - to enrich lives, grow

businesses, boost productivity, and make life-long learning easier. The Pareto Principle works throughout all of tech. The “80/20” focus on product decisions ultimately creates an Echo-Chamber. Product businesses are stuck in a virtuous cycle for Elite users means that tech is over-optimized for a small percentage of the population. The excluded normal usage participants (64%) and Non-participants (20%) become stuck in a vicious cycle. This policy would also ultimately help the BigTech businesses to grow their current markets.



P 11. Table 1

Comment: There is no strategy for state-wide coordination of Digital Equity or supporting local BATs as a vehicle for moving this work forward locally. King County does not have an official BAT, and one of the recommendations in the King County Plan was getting continued state support to formalize at King County BAT/support DELN for regional coordination of this work.

Addition: please include a glossary (e.g. acronyms)

Section 2: Introduction and Vision

Section 2.2.4

Table 3, P 32, KPI table

For point 4, ensuring that Washingtonians have opportunities to acquire the skills and understanding to participate in digital connectivity activities, the only baseline KPI refers to participation in digital navigator services. The KPI needs to be more broadly defined. Digital navigator services are important and should be the gateway to more extensive learning programs and services for those clients that need more support in gaining digital skills. The number of covered populations that are participating in more intensive digital literacy educational programs are missing from this KPI and should be supported and measured.

In general, please have specific metrics for success to track progress, not just programming but actual insights that come from the programming. Plan to revisit data component on monitoring and reporting

How will we measure outcomes? Consistency, relationship building, trust & institutional knowledge are extremely important in working with historically marginalized communities. These need to also be measured. Self-assessments can have a tendency to have low participation & be inaccurate.

Digital Navigator Programs MUST rely on consistency, trusted relationship building, & on-going community listening/outreach to reach our marginalized populations. Current success metrics give preference to organizations that think & work short-term with little to no focus on long-term outcomes.

Section 3: Barriers and Assets

3.2.1, P 74, Need resources for Community Anchor Institutions

Addition: this is a widely-identified need but is not clearly linked to any of the goals or KPIs in the report.

3.2.2, p 80. Incarcerated individuals

Addition: There is no data for incarcerated individuals in local jails, as opposed to the Washington state prison system. King County has a number of incarcerated individuals in the jails who could benefit from digital literacy services while incarcerated and work with incarcerated individuals in the jails should be supported by this plan.

The plan should also include support for re-entry and programs and organizations that focus on providing training and certification pathways for those justice system impacted individuals

3.2.2.4 p 90

Correction: Basic Education for Adults (BEA) programs in Washington state are required to integrate digital literacy instruction into all Basic skills classes, per Federal title 2 WIOA requirements. Community colleges and CBOs funded through BEA/SBCTC are required to teach the College and Career Readiness Standards, which include digital literacy integration across teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing, and math.

<https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf>

3.1.1 Pg. 37

Addition: There is no mention of Evergreen Goodwill as a provider of free digital equity services to multiple covered populations in Table 5 *Examples of Digital Inclusion Assets Serving Multiple Covered Populations* (pg. 37) nor the Appendix *Digital Inclusion Asset Inventory* (pg. 147).

EGNW wishes to include the following statement in the Asset Inventory: For over 13 years Evergreen Goodwill Northwest (EGNW) has been providing free digital skills training to covered populations across 5 counties in the Puget Sound area. Through a 2022-23 grant funded Digital

Navigation program EGNW was able to augment their digital equity work by offering device acquisition and affordable internet connectivity to their communities.

Section 4: Collaboration

4.1.5 P 126, Tribal Consultation and Engagement:

Add: Add specific engagement with urban Tribal communities in the Seattle/Puget Sound region. Digital Inclusion is difficult due to lack of access to resources for robust and affordable internet services. Need to work with trusted native non-profits to deliver digital literacy training and include diverse urban Native communities

Section 5: Implementation

P130 5.1.1.2 Activity 1.1

- a) *Add requiring ISPs to submit offerings and pricing list of at least the lowest 4 tiers of service offerings, in order to help monitor and promote affordable plans.*
- b) *Publish submitted ISP offerings to State website and make available via open database*

5.1.1.2 Activity 1.2: Support Washington Community Anchor Institutions (CAI)s to improve and increase the number of free, public Wi-Fi locations.

P 130: Support anchor institutions in free public wifi:

Barriers to connecting to public wifi, regular internet access

- Strategies should include:
 - Expansion of wi-fi availability in interior and exterior spaces at Community Anchor Institutions to include community non-profit centers
- Include investments in CBRS LTE (4/5G) and other community held broadband infrastructure/networks and community based organizations that build, manage, and maintain those networks

5.1.1.2 P 130, expand the improve and increase wifi locations to cover the internet in digital equity training facilities.

Add: a KPI to make sure that nonprofit organizations providing digital equity and community services have enough affordable wifi/bandwidth for their services and their clients' usage

Add Activity 1.3: Support Washington Community Anchor Institutions (CAI)s to improve and ensure sufficient internet service to provide digital skills training and public access to technology.

Key components:

- Conduct surveying of community non-profit organization internet needs
- Encourage ISPs to contribute connections such as the Lift Zones program.
- Investigate and promote options for affordable non-profit rates and connectivity, including cooperative purchasing or leveraging state and local connectivity and contracts, as well as connection to educational and institutional networks.

5.1.1.3 p. 131 Change language of Activity 1.3 to say low-cost and subsidized service, since affordable options aren't always subsidized.

"Leverage partners to help increase enrollment in *low-cost and* subsidized broadband service for low-income communities."

5.1.1.4 P 131: Digital equity dashboard Comment: There is not enough there in the key components, Define what SBO wants to see here. Will the services being delivered be shown in the dashboard?

5.1.1.4 P 131 Activity 1.4: Utilize Washington state Digital Equity Dashboard to identify gaps in broadband services for covered populations.

- Change wording to use Dashboard to identify and promote digital equity resources and program impact as well as gaps.
- Coordinate with a broader set of agencies and providers to identify and list assets and data
- Add partner and provide grants to regional and local partners to assist in development and updating directories of local digital equity program providers, which can be imported into the State dashboard
- Add provide training in use of the dashboard and promotion of its availability

5.1.2 Strategy 2: Implement innovative approaches to expand options for device availability and affordability.

P. 134 Add refurbishing and reuse programs to the strategies, as well as WA business participation in device solutions.

5.1.2.1 Change current title from: "Activity 2.1: Leverage existing partnerships to develop innovative or proven programs like statewide device recycling programs to increase affordability." to "*Develop innovative programs and sustainable funding models to encourage businesses and individuals to direct retired devices to refurbishment for*

reuse”. Reason: Need to promote refurbishing and reuse and place less emphasis in this section on recycling.

5.1.2.1 Key Components

- bullet 1: Change “Build upon the lessons learned from the Take it Back Network256 Coalition and other recycling programs to explore expanding or creating a statewide device-recycling program with organizations such as private retailers, repair shops, and government organizations” to *“Encourage and support Right to Repair resources and initiatives to promote device reuse, longevity, and Eco-friendliness”*
- bullet 2: Change “Partner with libraries to create locations to drop off devices for recycling and repair” to *“Partner with libraries and community organizations to create locations to drop off devices for recycling and repair and support organizations who perform refurbishment and repair of electronics.”*
- Bullet 3: Change “Partner with schools and colleges to create apprenticeships that can offer local repairs within local communities,” to *“Partner with schools, colleges, and community organizations to create apprenticeships that can offer local repairs within local communities”*
- Add Bullet 4: *“Encourage businesses across the state to work with community organizations and local businesses to refurbish and repair retired devices rather than just recycling them internally.”*
- Add Bullet 5: *“Build and promote a statewide ecosystem for electronic refurbishment and reuse that incentivizes Washington Business to refurbish and repair devices to improve access to affordable technology in areas most impacted by the digital divide.”*

Edits to Description:

By encouraging Washington businesses and individuals to send retired devices to local businesses and community organizations that refurbish and repair electronic devices, the pool of high-quality affordable devices increases in our state. The WSBO can explore building upon existing partnerships with counties, schools, libraries and colleges to develop a statewide device-recycling and refurbishment program that builds off the work designed by the Take it Back Network, existing community partnerships, and established Washington nonprofits, with multiple drop-off and pick-up locations across Washington to assist with recycling and upcycling used electronic equipment.

P. 135 5.1.2.2 Change the title from “Partner with ISPs, CAIs, and device distributors to co-develop awareness and marketing campaigns to promote low-cost broadband service plans, mobile network/hotspots, and free or low-cost device programs,” to *“Promote low-cost broadband plans, mobile network/hotspots, and free or low-cost device programs,”*

- Bullet 3: Change from “Expand on pre-existing hotspot distribution programs, increasing distribution locations in areas with in high covered population densities, such as school districts, rural areas, or senior and youth centers” to *“Expand and fund pre-existing hotspot distribution programs, increasing distribution locations in areas with in high covered population densities, such as school districts, rural areas, senior and youth centers as well as workforce, homeless, and housing insecure serving centers”*
- Add Bullet 4: *In areas with high population density, expand distribution and affordability of Wi-Fi mesh and repeaters that enable better penetration of homes and locations where low-income residents/households are sharing an internet connection.*

We need to hold these businesses accountable and must be able to find ways to ensure the RIGHT communities are getting served. Measuring the social economic & racial/cultural delineations of who is served & not served.

Edits to Description:

During our digital inclusion asset inventory data collection process, mobile networks and hotspots were a main source of internet connectivity for Washingtonians across the state, particularly in areas where traveling to community anchor institutions or other buildings with publicly available Wi-Fi posed a barrier. Mobile libraries offer open-access networks to areas within their counties that do not have a physical library location to access.

Library consortia additionally offer mobile hotspot lending programs, which provide internet access to smartphones, tablets, and other wireless-enabled devices through cellular networks. This equipment can typically be borrowed by anyone with a library card and offer unlimited data plans managed by the library. Free mobile hotspots can offer individuals access to the internet, regardless of ability to pay, where fixed internet infrastructure may currently be limited, or for individuals facing housing instability. The goal is to have loaner programs as well as more permanent user owned equipment and hotspots.

5.1.2.3 Activity 2.3: Change title from “Increase awareness and availability of programs that offer free or low-cost devices, such as tablets, smartphones, and laptops,” to *“Increase awareness, access, and funding of programs that offer free or low-cost devices, such as tablets, laptops, and smartphones”*

KEY COMPONENTS

- Change Bullet 1 from: “Utilize Digital Inclusion Asset Map, identified in Section 3.1, to locate device lending programs in Washington state.” to *“Utilize Digital Inclusion Asset Map, identified in Section 3.1, to locate device distribution programs in Washington state.”*
- Change Bullet 2 from: “Understand utilization of the programs among the covered population, and opportunities for the WSBO, digital navigators and other trusted messengers to support awareness, including statewide and focused campaigns.” to *“Analyze utilization of existing programs among populations most affected by the digital divide, and opportunities for the WSBO, digital navigators, community organizations, and*

trusted messengers to support access, including statewide and focused campaigns and initiatives”

- Change Bullet 3 from “Expand on pre-existing device lending programs, increasing lending locations in areas with in high covered population densities, such as school districts, rural areas, or senior Centers,” to *“Provide funding to expand availability of low-cost or free-to-user electronic devices, increasing the availability of high-quality, affordable devices in areas with high covered population densities, such as school districts, rural areas, senior and youth centers as well as workforce, homeless, and housing insecure serving centers”*
- Add Bullet 4: *Establish a Statewide database of organizations and entities offering free or low-cost device programs to promote utilization of existing resources.*
- *Digital Navigator Programs MUST rely on consistency, trusted relationship building, & on-going community listening/outreach to reach our marginalized populations. Current success metrics give preference to organizations that think & work short-term with little to no focus on long-term outcomes.*

Description change to:

Washington state has an expansive network of digital equity champions working to increase the availability of internet connectivity and access to affordable digital devices throughout the state of Washington. However, navigating how to access affordable internet can be challenging and availability of free or affordable devices are limited due to funding. The WSBO can work with partners like the Digital Navigator Programs and Digital Equity Forum to increase ease of access and fund programs that provide free and affordable devices for and to programs within covered populations to own and use as needed in their daily lives.

5.1.3 Strategy 3: Consolidate practices that promote online accessibility and inclusivity.

137

5.1.3.1: Partner with trusted messenger programs and orgs to share information about digital assistance etc. P 137. Key component: identify and strengthen trusted messenger organizations and programs such as digital navigators, BARS etc. Host digital inclusion conference to promote sharing of good practices.

Add: Link this to a KPI with more details about how the state will be supporting programs and organizations, especially linked to funding to support regional BATS, tribes, counties and coalitions like DELN.

Add: The state needs to convene past and future orgs that receive or have received funding like past and future digital navigator programs to document and consolidate best practices and provide state-wide and regional training around best practices, particularly using the experience of the digital navigator model so we don't lose systemic learning.

Comment: The State needs to ensure that marginalized communities are actually receiving and trust the information being disseminated. Partnerships with trusted organizations or leaders--using a social health outreach model is a time tested approach that works. The low participation from individuals from historically marginalized communities in the public engagement sessions mentioned in Section 1.1 shows that the initial outreach methods that were utilized during the summer of 2022 and 2023 were ineffective.

5.1.4 Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy.

..... **138**

5.1.4 Strategy 4: Provide services that promote digital literacy.

Section 5.1.4.1, P 138 Expand digital literacy programs based on lessons from the state Digital Navigator Program.

- Comment: What is the “digital navigator curriculum?” Unclear. How would the curriculum be embedded into programs that are not digitally focused? Please expand upon.
- Add: Digital skills being built through this program should be useful in terms of improving an individual's social, health & economic outcomes--how do we measure these outcomes? How do these measures the steps toward applied skills? Self-assessments can have a tendency to have low participation & be inaccurate.

Section 5.1.4.2, P 139, Coordinate with educational institutions, workforce boards and coalitions to expand training to upskill the workforce necessary to implement broadband infrastructure projects.

- Yes – working as a coalition of community organizations, government agencies, educators, and others is crucial to success, but this will need to be adequately funded across the board and grants are time consuming, expensive in terms of labor hours to complete, and not accessible to all.

“Encourage public and private institutions to provide increased access to on-the-job digital skill training programming and resources.” Once people have achieved digital access, a device, and a job where they can receive this training it could be effective.

- Comment: Does this include caseworkers for social service agencies or employment? These case workers who need clients to be able to fill out forms, resumes, or do a job search need help on best practices that are time efficient to help their clients gain skills needed.

I suggest that social workers/case workers receive at least one basic training on working with clients who lack the necessary digital skills. It would also be helpful if basic digital literacy classes were provided on site at agencies like DSHS, Veterans administration, WorkSource, senior centers, disability services, community health care clinics, etc

- Comment: The rationale is not clear here as to why so much attention is given to building up the workforce to implement broadband infrastructure projects as opposed to focusing more generally on supporting digital literacy skills building and training for all ages regardless of employment status. The need and anticipated impact are not clear.
- Add: this is not linked to a KPI or clear funding to support these activities. This is crucial to increasing WA residents’ digital literacy and should also include CBOs and community anchor institutions as possible partners.

Section 5.1.4.3, P 140 Expand student & family involvement in digital literacy services.

- Link is not clear between supporting OSPI and school districts and expanding student and family involvement in digital literacy services. Add: Would like to see clear connection.

Section 5.1.4.4, P 140 Measuring Digital Literacy.

- Add a strategy to better define the variety of settings and levels of training needed for digital skills development and or support for digital literacy standards development and use across providers. Consider clarifying the range of activities that digital skills are essential.
- Comment: Agreed standards for DL should be identified, but as far as finding out where people are and what they need in our state; how to do this? If individuals don’t have the access or digital skills to participate in surveys or other online efforts to identify skills gaps how will they participate? By definition this would

have to be done in person instead of online, and that eliminates people who are housebound, live in distant rural areas, or don't have transportation. Thinking of the mobile library vans that used to go out to housebound individuals and to rural areas.

Comment: Across the board, this sub-strategy appears to leave out consideration for the needs and interests of older adults. Sections 5.1.4.2 and 5.1.4.3 both center around younger populations, such as school-aged children and youth as well as working-aged adults. Digital literacy training and skills building are very much in demand amongst older adults regardless of employment status. This strategy should include specific actions to target the needs of older adults for a more holistic reach. Please also look at youth transitions, vocational rehab, connection to workforce development, disability services, which are not detailed in this section of the plan as key stakeholders and communities.

Add: connections to the domains in which people need to use digital skills. Like banking, shopping etc. What is the collaboration with these organizations (like banks, providing training on using the online banking platform) and systems such as health care or banking.

Section 6: Conclusion

Section 7: Appendix

7.4 Pierce County's programs are missing

Table 7.7, P 182. Tribal Engagement activities

- Add: strategies for overcoming systemic barriers because of issues of affordability of the internet and devices, need to work with trusted native organizations. The plan needs to recognize there are needs on Tribal Lands but also of native community members off Tribal lands that need digital equity. Related Data: 17% of Native household participants said they did not have devices with adequate screen size - from 2023 Seattle summary.