BEAD AND DIGITAL EQUITY COORDINATION & OUTREACH STRATEGY

Overview

The N.C. Department of Information Technology's Division of Broadband and Digital Equity received $1.4 million in planning funds for the Digital Equity program and $5 million in planning funds for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. With these funds, the Division will engage and solicit feedback from a variety of broadband and digital equity stakeholders across the state that have a vested interest in expanding high-speed internet access and building digital equity within the communities they serve, represent, or in which they live. The Division will use data gleaned from all outreach efforts to create comprehensive BEAD and Digital Equity program plans to guide subsequent investments from both programs.

Objectives

- To achieve Governor Roy Cooper's goal to close the digital divide in North Carolina.
- To demonstrate NCDIT's commitment to fostering a digitally connected and enabled state.
- To develop deeper partnerships and bi-directional communication channels with broadband and digital equity stakeholders across the state that can best represent the needs of the communities they serve.
- To ensure the Division's comprehensive, statewide broadband expansion and digital equity plans will address and positively and measurably benefit all North Carolina communities.
- To ensure North Carolina's broadband maps reflect unserved and underserved locations and that residents know how to access state maps and the FCC National Broadband Map and submit challenges as needed.

Communication Goals

- Ensure clear, timely, and direct communication of appropriate information to encourage participation in the planning programs and provide prompt response to any misinformation.
- Maintain updated information about planning for BEAD and the Digital Equity programs for internal and external audiences on the ncbroadband.gov website.
- Provide information to senior leadership so they can communicate about the funding programs and ongoing planning details with interested cabinet agencies, external organizations, and the media, as necessary.
- Address language barriers and provide accommodating translation and interpretation services. Ensure all print and digital publications are in at least English and Spanish. Some publications may appear in the top six languages used in North Carolina.
- Engage various media outlets based on covered populations.

Audiences

- Covered populations and organizations that represent them:
  - Aging individuals
  - Immigrants
  - Individuals who live in households at or below 150% of Federal poverty level
  - Individuals with disabilities
  - Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who
    - Are English learners; and
    - Have low levels of literacy

- o Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group
- o Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
- o Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility
- o LGBTQI+ people
- o Veterans.
- Agriculture and Cooperative Extension agencies
- Chambers of Commerce
- Civil Rights organizations
- Community Anchor Institutions
- Community and grassroots organizations
- Community Centers and recreation centers
- Counties
- Economic Development organizations
- Educational agencies
- Emergency responders
- Faith-based organizations
- Funders
- Governor's Office
- Higher education institutions (with special emphasis on minority serving institutions)
- Internet service providers
- Labor organizations
- Libraries
- Media
- Municipalities
- N.C. Digital Equity and Inclusion Collaborative
- Nonprofit organizations
- North Carolina residents
- Public Housing Authorities
- Public Utilities Commission
- Regional Councils of Government
- Small businesses
- State agencies
- Technology device manufacturers and providers
- Tribal Governments
- Workforce development organizations

Key Messages

- Governor Roy Cooper has developed a comprehensive strategy to build digital equity across North Carolina, and the Division of Broadband and Digital Equity is executing that strategy by ensuring that all North Carolinians have access to an affordable, high-speed internet connection and have the devices and skills necessary to participate in the modern digital economy.
- The N.C. Division of Broadband and Digital Equity will use the Digital Equity and Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) planning grants to help fund local coordination efforts to ensure that the state's comprehensive plans to address high-speed internet access and digital equity are inclusive of all N.C. communities and populations' needs.
- The Division is seeking input from stakeholders across the state to ensure that we create effective plans that address the needs of all N.C. communities and populations.
- With these Internet for All planning grants, we will be able to create comprehensive state plans to address broadband access and digital equity and literacy needs for all North Carolinians and build upon our existing work to close the digital divide.

Strategy

The Division will employ the following approaches to ensure that we have thorough outreach to all audiences.

1. **Engage Consultants to Assist with Outreach & Communication**
   The Division will partner with agencies to develop educational collateral to distribute, facilitate eight regional sessions, facilitate up to 20 listening sessions with covered populations, and compile findings from these sessions to inform the plans. The listening sessions will use human centered design or similar practices to better understand the barriers covered populations face and identify solutions to overcome these barriers.

2. **Tracking Impact and Engagement**
   To ensure that we engage all the covered populations and target audiences, the Division will use software to document all invited representatives and participants to measure engagement and record the needs and/or barriers of each community represented.

3. **Communicating with Audiences**
   Create and deploy a comprehensive communications plan with in-person, online, print, and digital and social media tactics to engage and collect feedback from stakeholders and covered populations.

Tactics and Goals

- **Surveys**
  - Determine need for Digital Equity survey by analyzing baseline data and working with the Data and Barriers Working Group convened for the Digital Equity planning process to identify potential data collection opportunities. Based on these activities, assess data gaps, and deploy surveys to better understand the barriers faced by each covered population (could include collecting data from other state agencies).
  - Continued use of the N.C. Broadband Survey (hosted by Qualtrics and created in partnership with the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at N.C. State University) to identify locations unserved and underserved with broadband across the state
  - Distribute all surveys widely via partnership with other state agencies, counties, municipalities, nonprofits, organizations, and media outlets

- **Regional Sessions**
  - Host at least eight regional sessions – one in each prosperity region defined by the N.C. General Assembly
  - Partner with host organizations, counties, and municipalities to promote widely within each prosperity region
  - Host one during the N.C. Rural Summit in conjunction with N.C. Rural Center
  - Develop a protocol to use in regional sessions
  - Obtain participation and feedback from 50-75 attendees at each regional session

- **Listening Sessions**
  - Include covered populations in up to 20 listening sessions
  - Partner with trusted intermediary organizations in regions to host and organize the sessions
  - Develop a protocol to use in all sessions
  - Obtain participation and feedback from 8-12 attendees at each session

- **Webinars**
  - Kickoff process for all – explain why we're doing it, why it's important, and what to expect
  - Provide quarterly updates via webinars that will have registration beforehand and on-demand viewing after
  - Use Office of Public Engagement platforms to share updates and invite participation
  - Share recordings with local organizations to provide during live/in-person meetings so trusted local organizations can share messaging and collect feedback

- **Interagency coordination**
  - Hold interviews with key agencies (as outlined in federal Notice of Funding Opportunity)
  - Obtain participation and feedback from at least six state agencies including those that represent: economic and workforce development, education, health, transportation, natural & cultural resources, and the delivery of other essential services

- **Web pages for BEAD & Digital Equity information**
  - Landing page(s) where we can refer stakeholders
  - Post resources
  - Announcements about events, surveys, etc.
  - Acknowledgements for core planning teams and working groups
  - Post the draft plans for public comments for at least 30 days

- **Advertising/Marketing/Promotion**
  - Create materials to promote sessions (print and digital)
  - Design materials to promote statewide surveys:
    - Digital - Twitter, Facebook, Nextdoor, agency and partner organization electronic newsletters
    - Print – Flyers, Mailers, etc.
    - Media buys as needed
  - Email, video, and digital content creation
  - Partner with hyper local community outlets (neighborhood newsletters, town flyers, radio, etc.)
  - Create and distribute a media kit for all engaged organizations to use to promote engagement options
  - Include translation and interpretation services to ensure that all materials are inclusive

- **Summit event**
  - Share what we learned from public engagement opportunities
  - Invite stakeholders to respond to lessons learned and inform strategies that will be incorporated in the plans based on that input
  - Make both in-person and virtual options available
  - Post recorded sessions on website

Outreach Tactics and Timeline

Additional tactics and details will be added to the timeline as scheduled.

Date	Tactic
Feb. 7	Fiber Broadband Association presentation in Raleigh
Feb. 22	N.C. Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) task force presentation
March 7	Q1 Webinar: Kickoff process for all – explain why we're doing it, why it's important, and what to expect
March 9	N.C. Agriculture Digital Alliance listening session
March 9	N.C. Commission of Indian Affairs presentation

March 21	Rural Summit listening session
March to May	NCACC District Meetings across the state
March to June	Up to 20 listening sessions for covered populations in partnership with community-based organizations
April & May	Interviews with select state agencies to align these plans with their strategic plans as appropriate
April 3	How the Maps Could Determine our Rural Broadband Future Webinar with NC Broadband Matters
April 25	Regional session: Sandhills Region (Fayetteville)
April 26	Regional session: North Central Region (Rocky Mount)
April 27	Regional session: Southeast Region (Jacksonville)
May 2	Regional session: Piedmont Triad Region (Kernersville)
May 4	Regional session: Northwest Region (Morganton)
May 8	Regional session: Western Region (Cherokee)
May 11	Regional session: Northeast Region (Elizabeth City)
May 16	Regional session: Southwest Region (Wingate)
May 23	Summit convening [Partners: National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA), NCACC & N.C. League of Municipalities]
June 8	Q2 webinar update
June	Draft BEAD plan published for public comments
June	Draft BEAD plan published in community outlets for public comments
July 29	BEAD 5 YR PLAN DUE to NTIA
August	Q3 webinar update
September	Draft Digital Equity plan published for public comments
September	Draft Digital Equity plan published in community outlets for public comments
Oct. 30	DIGITAL EQUITY PLAN DUE TO NTIA
November	Q4 webinar update