

Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan

January 19, 2024





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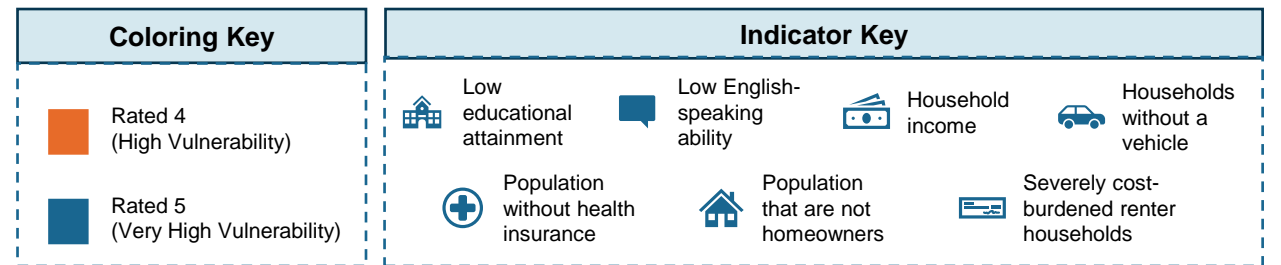
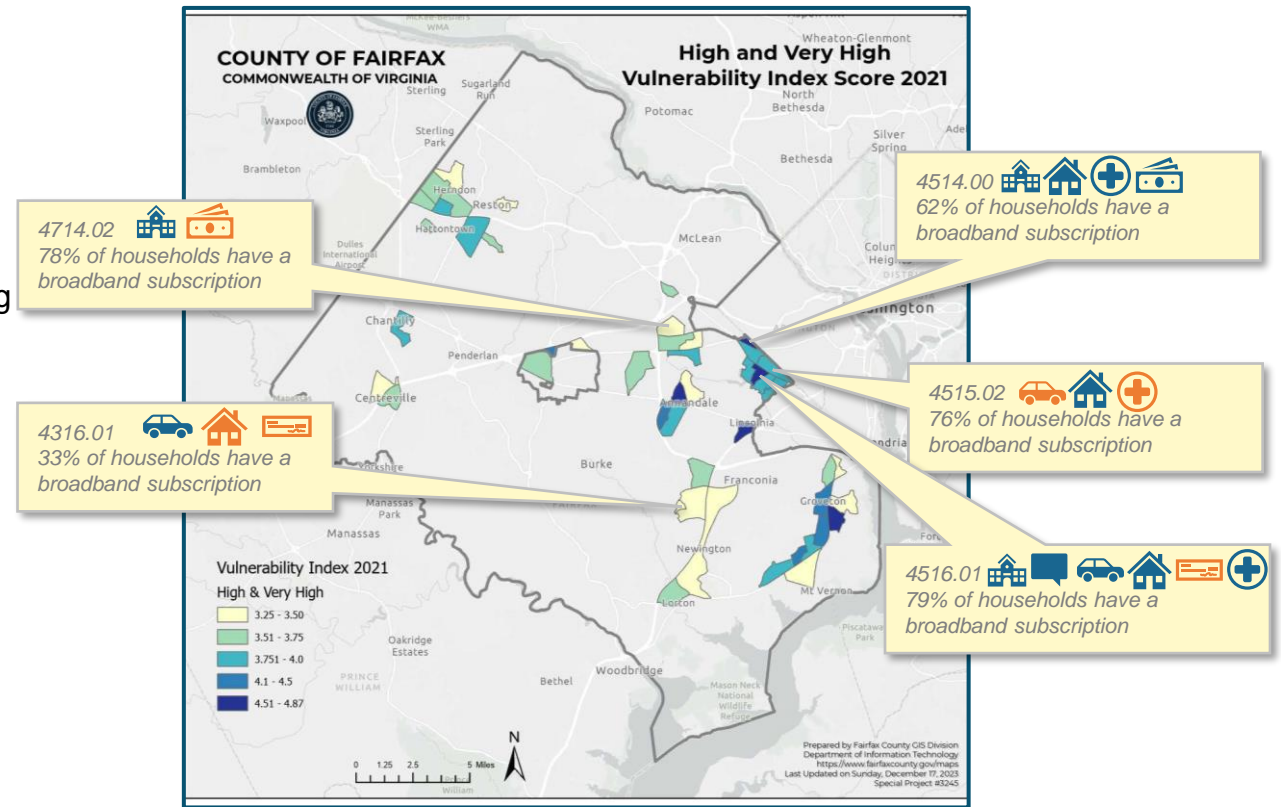
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Executive Summary

Fairfax County has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to digital equity, making significant strides in connecting residents with broadband and the opportunities presented by digital technologies. Despite these efforts, a number of households¹ (~13,900) do not have access to a computer at home and/or an internet subscription, of which many are located in neighborhoods with high or very high vulnerability index scores. Aligning with the One Fairfax Policy and the Countywide Strategic Plan, closing the digital divide by ensuring opportunities for all residents to participate and engage in a connected community serves as a foundational element in this Digital Equity Action Plan.

The plan outlines goals and a strategic approach aimed at narrowing the digital divide. By implementing targeted actions, the plan seeks to eliminate barriers hindering residents from accessing broadband and technology. The findings indicate that households categorized as "High" and "Very High" Vulnerability are less likely to have broadband subscriptions or devices at home. Furthermore, statistics on device ownership and broadband access might obscure realities, as devices provided by schools may be counted as household devices but may not offer full online content access; and for those lacking reliable access, speed tests alone may not provide a complete picture of accessibility. This plan proposes specific actions to gather data to inform decisions.

The strategic approach involves collaborative efforts with various partners, including County departments, nonprofit organizations, and internet service providers. This Action Plan outlines practical steps for Fairfax County to take, emphasizing continuous monitoring to align with the County's goals. The plan aligns with the County's Strategic Plan by identifying Key Drivers impacted by this work. Acknowledging external factors beyond the County's control, the plan anticipates developing a flexible system to adapt based on funding and decisions from the Commonwealth and Federal Government.



1. [US Census \(2022\) Types of Computer and Internet Subscriptions.](#)

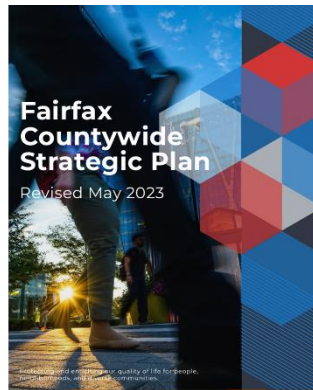


The Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan builds upon the County's Strategic Plan and One Fairfax Policy

The Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan reflects the County's values. It centers equity, inclusion, and thoughtful engagement in the development and implementation of digital equity work.



BUILDING ON EXISTING POLICIES AND PLANS...



Digital equity

is defined by Fairfax County as the ability to **access, understand, and use digital tools** that are essential for many tasks in modern life, including applying for jobs, paying bills, enjoying recreational activities, completing homework, staying informed, and connecting with government/community services.

... TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



3.3%

or 13.9k Fairfax County households lack a broadband subscription ¹



1.6%

or 6.8k Fairfax County households lack a computer ¹



30%

or 26.75k eligible Fairfax County households are enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) ^{2*}

Fairfax County's digital landscape

represents a **duality of experiences**. Some Fairfax County residents enjoy the best of what the digital world has to offer and are at the **cutting edge of technological innovation**, while others **require additional support and resources to get connected at the most basic level**. The County's digital equity priorities aim to meet the needs of both groups of Fairfax County residents and all those in between by removing barriers.

1. [US Census \(2022\) Types of Computer and Internet Subscriptions](#). | 2. [Benton Institute ACP Tool](#) *As of 2/8/2024 (the last day to enroll in ACP was 2/7/2024 at 11:59pm).



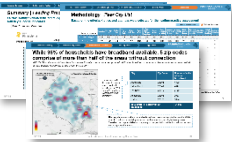
Three core inputs serve as the foundation of the Digital Equity Action Plan

The development of the Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan was an iterative process that involved analyses, inputs from stakeholder conversations, leading practices from peers and strategic considerations.



Stakeholder Engagement

The insights gathered from conversations with 56 stakeholders and community organizations provided a wealth of knowledge that informed the Digital Equity Action Plan. The County's plans for continued community engagement is articulated in the Getting It Done section of the Action Plan.



Leading Practices Research and Assessment

Research, mapping, and data analysis informed an assessment of Fairfax County's current digital equity landscape and helped identify strengths and opportunities for growth. Leading localities were assessed to highlight innovative initiatives for Fairfax County to consider.



Strategic Visioning and Framework Development

The Digital Equity Action Plan framework was developed by reviewing major County plans and initiatives, including the Countywide Strategic Plan and the One Fairfax Policy.



**Fairfax County
Digital Equity
Action Plan**



Stakeholder perspectives and insights helped inform the development of the Digital Equity Action Plan

Fairfax County is committed to the development of an Action Plan that is representative of County voices. These insights serve as a launchpad as the County will continue to conduct community engagement to further understand the issues residents face.



Fairfax County engaged community partners, internet service providers, and fellow County departments in a series of interviews. These interviews **provided a detailed perspective of digital equity in Fairfax County.**

Several open "office hours" conversations were made available to the stakeholders. **This flexible format allowed for additional departments, nonprofits, and internet service providers to join in the discussion and share diverse perspectives.**

The County held leadership briefings with several oversight leaders, including the Chief Equity Officer, Director of Department of Information Technology and the Digital Equity Coordination Team. These conversations facilitated the **shared creation of the digital equity vision, goals, and strategies** for Fairfax County.

Many nonprofit organizations cited broadband and device affordability as the biggest barrier to digital equity



"We are approaching [digital equity] through the lens of the populations we serve and are assessing need and seeking resources"

Multiple departments shared that marketing materials are currently only offered in English

"A challenge for us is device fleet shrinkage"



Stakeholders explored the idea of expanded Wi-Fi in County facilities



"[Families] need the opportunity for digital literacy because a lot of their kids are digital natives and they're leaving their families behind"

Several County departments do not offer dedicated digital skill-building programs; however, they do offer 1:1 tech support to residents

"Fairfax County requires a delicate balance of supporting both our well-resourced communities and those who are most vulnerable"





The Digital Equity Action Plan outlines targeted goals, strategies, and actions for each of the following five focus areas.

Identifying and prioritizing areas of focus provide the foundation for the strategies and metrics Fairfax County will pursue in their Action Plan.



Access

The County should explore different options to bring fast and reliable broadband access directly to or in proximity of all residents.



Awareness

Fairfax County can enhance its understanding of the barriers residents face when accessing digital resources by directly engaging with them.



Advancement

Improving the coordination of County's digital equity efforts as well as dedicated resources and established standardized metrics are necessary to bridge the digital divide.



Affordability

Locations with lower-than-average broadband access experience higher vulnerability based on the Fairfax County Vulnerability Index



Adoption

Currently there is no standard measure of digital literacy, effort can be better measured and coordinated with goal alignment.



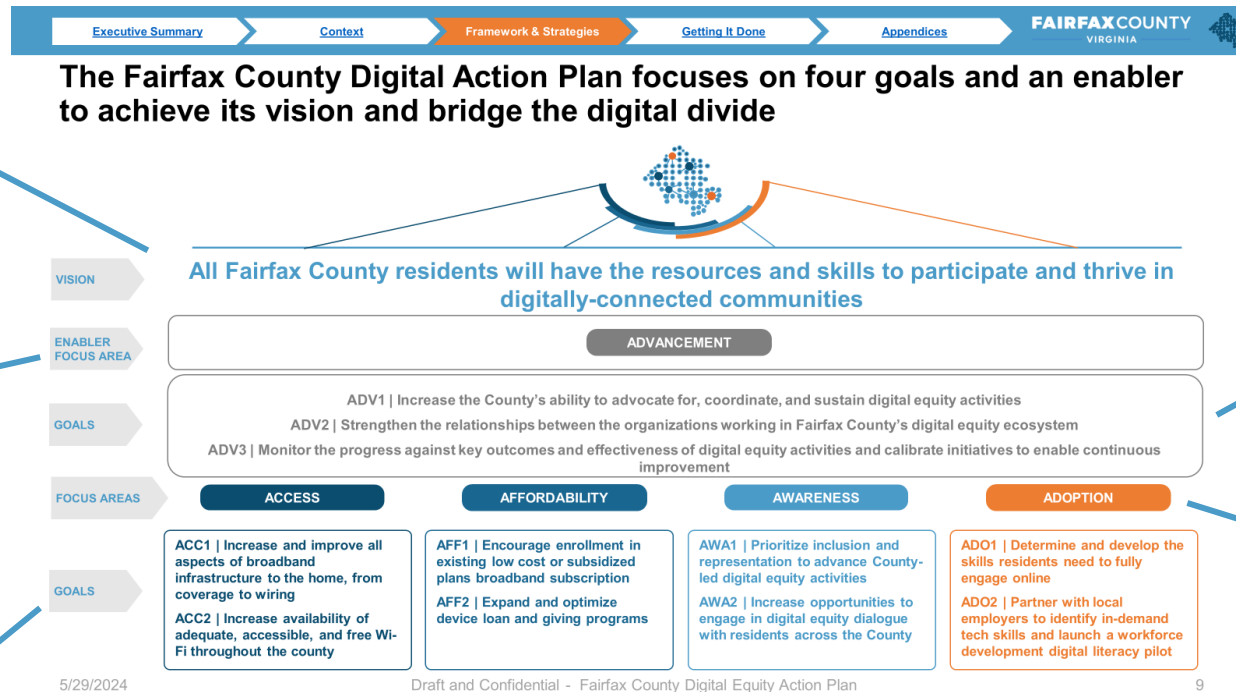
The Digital Equity Strategic Framework shows how actionable steps build towards the overarching vision for digital equity

The Digital Equity Action Plan Strategic Framework has several interwoven components that articulate a collective impact approach to digital equity work. Each facet of the framework is described below.

The vision articulates Fairfax County's aspirations for the future of digital equity.

This enabler focus areas is a preliminary effort that supports all other focus areas.

Goals and related strategies will drive the County in the direction of fully digitally-connected communities



Goals articulate the core actions that drive the advancement of the Action Plan.

The focus areas complement each other and serve to organize Fairfax County's digital equity pursuits.



The Fairfax County Digital Action Plan focuses on four goals and an enabler to achieve its vision and bridge the digital divide



VISION

All Fairfax County residents will have the resources and skills to participate and thrive in digitally-connected communities

ENABLER FOCUS AREA

ADVANCEMENT

GOALS

- ADV1 | Increase the County’s ability to advocate for, coordinate, and sustain digital equity activities
- ADV2 | Strengthen the relationships between the organizations working in Fairfax County’s digital equity ecosystem
- ADV3 | Monitor the progress against key outcomes and effectiveness of digital equity activities and calibrate initiatives to enable continuous improvement

FOCUS AREAS

ACCESS

AFFORDABILITY

AWARENESS

ADOPTION

GOALS

- ACC1 | Increase and improve all aspects of broadband infrastructure to the home, from coverage to wiring
- ACC2 | Increase availability of adequate, accessible, and free Wi-Fi throughout the county

- AFF1 | Encourage enrollment in existing low cost or subsidized plans broadband subscription
- AFF2 | Expand and optimize device loan and giving programs

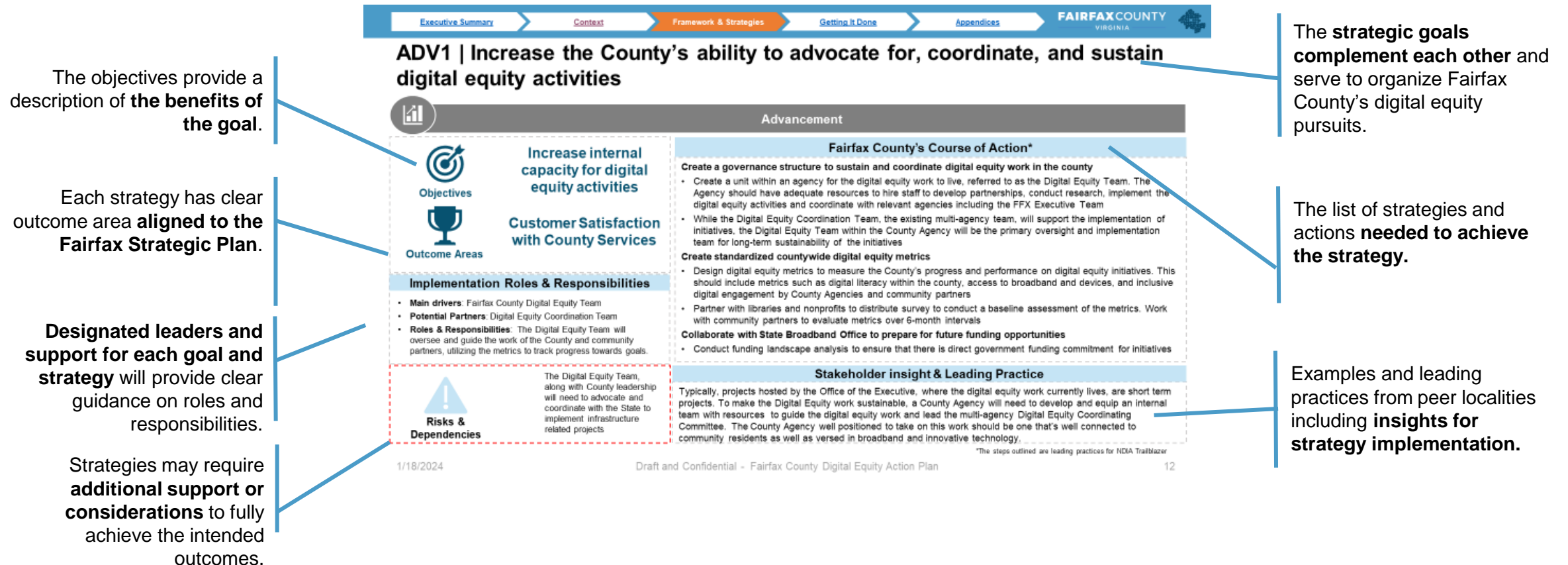
- AWA1 | Prioritize inclusion and representation to advance County-led digital equity activities
- AWA2 | Increase opportunities to engage in digital equity dialogue with residents across the County

- ADO1 | Determine and develop the skills residents need to fully engage online
- ADO2 | Partner with local employers to identify in-demand tech skills and launch a workforce development digital literacy pilot



Additional context about the course of action is provided for each of the strategies in the Strategic Framework

The comprehensive analysis framework provides descriptions of actions, benefits, and considerations for each of the strategies. Additional details of this framework is described below.





ADV1 | Increase the County's ability to advocate for, coordinate, and sustain digital equity activities



Advancement



Objectives

Increase internal capacity for digital equity activities



Outcome Areas

Effective and Efficient Government

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff
- **Potential Partners:** Digital Equity Coordination Team
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Digital Equity staff will oversee and guide the work of the County and community partners, utilizing the metrics to track progress towards goals.



Risks & Dependencies

A dedicated, well-resourced team is needed to drive the Action Plan forward. Team will require Fairfax County leadership buy-in and strong community support.

Fairfax County's Course of Action*

Create a governance structure to sustain and coordinate digital equity work in the county

- Dedicate staff, within the county agency where digital equity work to live, to develop partnerships, conduct research, implement the digital equity activities and coordinating with relevant departments, including the Fairfax County Government Senior Leadership Team
- While the Digital Equity Coordination Team, the existing multi-agency team, will support the implementation of initiatives, dedicated staff lead (s) will provide primary oversight and implementation for long-term sustainability of the initiatives

Create standardized countywide digital equity metrics

- Design digital equity metrics to measure the County's progress and performance on digital equity initiatives. Metrics to consider, include digital literacy within the county, access to broadband and devices, and inclusive digital engagement by county departments and community partners
- Partner with county departments and nonprofits to distribute survey to conduct a baseline assessment of the metrics. Work with community partners to evaluate metrics over 6-month intervals

Collaborate with State Broadband Office to prepare for future funding opportunities

- Conduct funding landscape analysis to identify funding opportunities aligned with initiatives

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

As a short-term solution, digital equity efforts are currently led by the Office of the County Executive. To make the digital equity work sustainable, a county department will need to develop and equip an internal position(s) with resources to guide the digital equity work and lead the cross-departmental Digital Equity Coordination Team. The best positioned county department to take on this work, would be one that's well connected to community residents as well as versed in broadband and innovative technology.

*The steps outlined are leading practices for NDIA Trailblazer



ADV2 | Strengthen the relationships between the organizations working in Fairfax County's digital equity ecosystem



Advancement



Objectives

Increase external capacity to implement digital equity initiatives



Outcome Areas

Effective and Efficient Government

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff
- **Potential Partners:** Nonprofits, Philanthropy, and Private Sector
- **Roles & Responsibilities.** Nonprofits will act as recipients of competitive grants. The private sector and philanthropy can act as funders/partners.



Risks & Dependencies

Federal or state funds may have limited purposes and specific timelines.

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Engage community partners in digital equity coordination efforts

- Expand digital equity coordination to include representation from residents, business owners and others that can support implementation of initiatives in alignment with the county's strategic goals for empowering residents
- Provide clear roles and responsibilities for the partners, including formal agenda, team charter, and channels to report on progress to create accountability

Explore a "Digital Equity Fund" and other grant opportunities for community partners

- Leverage County funds and private/philanthropic funds to launch specific project grants for non-government partners related to improving digital equity
- Take advantage of existing County resources to start the fund and then use data collected from initial grants to attract federal, private, and philanthropic funds for long-term sustainability
- Leverage this plan to determine what types of projects the County wishes to fund and develop specific metrics for those projects

Normalize this plan with the community and Fairfax County departments to operationalize the plan

- Share Digital Equity Action Plan with stakeholders to develop buy-in and support with implementation of initiatives *Additional details for socialization can be found in the Getting it Done section*

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

Managed by the Baltimore Civic Fund, the Digital Equity Fund is an initiative to support the creation of community-led digital inclusion plans and provide funding for communities to bring those plans to life. The City allocated \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for the current grant cycle. The fund provides three types of grants to Baltimore-based non-profit organizations working in close partnership with communities: (1) education and outreach grants (\$5-\$10k), (2) Planning grants (up to \$50k); and (3) implementation grants.



ADV3 | Monitor the progress against key outcomes and effectiveness of digital equity activities and calibrate initiatives to enable continuous improvement



Advancement



Objectives

Utilizing innovative technology
continuous improvement



Outcome Areas

Effective and Efficient
Government

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff
- **Potential Partners:** County Departments
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** The Digital Equity staff will need to consistently monitor activities, review research and policies, and connect to communities to account for unintended consequences



Risks & Dependencies

There may be delays in realizing how new technologies and process changes may negatively impact communities with high vulnerability. The team will need to be flexible and willing to adapt and work with communities understanding outcomes.

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Ensure that digital equity principles are incorporated while making county information available

- Monitor digital equity programs and innovative tech involving artificial intelligence, new devices, and other tools
- Understand benefits of innovative tech while weighing impacts to communities with high vulnerability
- Educate staff about the readability and Section 508 compliance of digital content to ensure equitable access
- Further enhance multicultural digital communications by improving digital emergency information assets, messaging, and processes in select languages
- Utilize Digital Equity Coordination Team as well as other feedback opportunities with communities to understand and adjust strategies to adapt to impacts
- Apply an equity lens to assess how the county's use of technology contributes to inequities

Consider opportunities to include digital equity principles into existing programs and initiatives

- Embed evidence-based practices, such as digital navigation services and sign-ups for affordability programs, into existing department operations and initiatives

Evaluate the effectiveness of digital equity programming to identify areas of improvement/enhancement

- Consistently monitor and adjust digital equity programming as data and insights become available
- Utilize feedback loops for program participants and administrators to gain participant perceptiveness

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

How technology tools and platforms are used can either alleviate or contribute to inequities in the county. As the County works with partners to advance digital equity and adopt more innovative in technology, intentional and consistent evaluation of technology's impact on different populations is critical to ensure that advancements are not creating unintended consequences.



ACC1 | Increase and improve all aspects of broadband infrastructure, from coverage to wiring



Access



Objectives

Create justification for Federal, Commonwealth, and local funding sources to close the gaps



Outcome Areas

Housing and Neighborhood Livability

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County
- **Potential Partners:** Nonprofits and County Departments
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** The County will perform the data analysis and work with community partner to conduct the speed tests. This information should be used to apply for grants to expand and improve service



Risks & Dependencies

While the County does own some fiber, there are State restrictions for offering retail services to residents. This may impact the ability for the County to expand services to residents beyond county owned buildings

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Continue a deep dive of population-level data to identify communities of opportunity for collective digital access actions.

- Leverage the County's GIS experts and population-level data, such as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data, to understand characteristics of areas without Broadband in Fairfax County (density, demographics, socio-economic status)
- Based on data, identify priority neighborhoods and existing access gaps to inform action needed

Create speed test data collection engagement strategy with nonprofits and internet service providers (ISPs)

- Continue to work with community partners including nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and county departments to create a campaign to conduct speed and reliability tests across priority neighborhoods
- Leverage best practices around surveying communities

Coordinate with ISPs on areas without coverage and increase efforts to bring in faster options, such as fiber

- Work with ISP to investigate wiring at multi-dwelling units (MDUs) and other locations identified as limited broadband availability
- Investigate opportunities to expand Wi-Fi throughout the county

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

In May 2023, The Kansas Broadband Office launched a speed test campaign designed to provide more accurate data to inform where to allocate federal and state resources. The campaign encouraged residents to use the State website to take multiple speed test over the course of a few hours for improved accuracy. For residents without a connection, Kansas Broadband office provided a connect number to report the address.



ACC2 | Increase availability of adequate, accessible, and free Wi-Fi throughout the County



Access



Objectives

Support free wi-fi in locations where residents without access gather



Outcome Areas

Housing and Neighborhood Livability

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** County Department of Information Technology
- **Potential Partners:** County Departments, Local Park Districts, Community Anchor Institutions
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Using data on broadband subscription rates, the County can develop priorities neighborhoods for free Wi-Fi then partner to expand public Wi-Fi.



Risks & Dependencies

Wi-Fi infrastructure and equipment may be subject to damage/security concerns. The County will need to consider security protocols for the public wi-fi including firewalls, which may pose an additional cost.

Fairfax County's Course of Action

In Fairfax county, 16,299 household do not have a broadband internet subscription. To expand free Wi-Fi access in areas that face low broadband subscription rates, the County can pilot a program that equips county businesses, community anchor institutions (CAIs) and parks with Wi-Fi hotspots.

Explore opportunities to leverage Fairfax County's Broadband backbone to provide services

- Advocate at the Commonwealth level to expand County owned fiber to provide retail services to neighborhoods with limited availability

Identify Opportunities for Wi-Fi expansion

- Leverage the existing list of CAIs without gigabit symmetrical speeds in areas with high vulnerability when deciding where to expand
- Continue to map community-based organizations and County departments that provide Wi-Fi in relation to high and very high vulnerability areas
- Identify County capacity to expand broadband access, including funding to create more public Wi-Fi locations, expanding hours at existing public Wi-Fi locations, and/or partnering with nonprofits to create new public Wi-Fi locations
- Work with County departments to understand the feasibility of extending wi-fi service hours or signal reach for locations near neighborhoods

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

In 2021, the City of Arlington, Texas used funding from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) act to support the City's Smart Lighting and Neighborhood Wi-Fi project. The City used Census data to identify low-income areas without internet services. This information was overlaid with existing City networks and infrastructure to identify streets for expanded access. The City installed equipment at existing traffic control cabinets, streetlights and expanded the City-owned fiber to extend services.



AFF1 | Encourage enrollment in existing low cost or subsidized broadband subscription plans



Affordability



Objectives

Incentivize investment in affordability programs for ISPs



Outcome Areas

Empowerment and Support for Residents facing Vulnerabilities

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff
- **Potential Partners:** Commonwealth, ISPs, Nonprofits and Partners
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Fairfax County can advocate for affordable broadband plans with ISPs and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Awareness campaigns, in partnership with community partners and nonprofits, can be used inform communities.



Risks & Dependencies

There are few precedents of other localities establishing County-sponsored affordability programs
Currently, Virginia legislation prohibits service subsidies at the local level.

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Continue deep dive of neighborhoods with high vulnerability's data to understand specific barriers

- Research and identify which communities do not qualify for ACP but require financial support to adopt broadband service
- Continue to leverage GIS data to understand population-level insights across the county regarding broadband and device ownership and usage
- Engage identified communities on the ground to collect qualitative data and hear firsthand about their challenges accessing broadband and devices

Advertise existing affordability plans

- Increase awareness of existing affordable broadband subscription plans (i.e. ISP-specific plans) among residents

Advocate for additional low-cost broadband plans with the Commonwealth and ISPs

- Encourage ISPs to offer low- and middle-income broadband plans
- Influence the legislative environment in the Commonwealth to promote additional avenues for broadband affordability support

Explore a County broadband subsidy program similar to ACP

- Research peer localities and innovative affordability program alternatives to tailor the best program for Fairfax County

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

Albemarle County, Virginia offers an additional \$20 to eligible members through their [ACP Bridge program](#). Albemarle County staff may offer insights and leading practices for launching a County-operated affordability program that could be leveraged in Fairfax County.



AFF2 | Expand and optimize device loan and giving programs



Affordability



Objectives

Connect every Fairfax County resident with the technological devices



Outcome Areas

Lifelong Education and Learning

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff
- **Potential Partners:** County Libraries, Public Schools, Nonprofits
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Digital Equity staff and Coordination team can leverage existing relationships to identify funding sources for device lending and gifting programs. Libraries and public schools offer existing device fleets to augment, and nonprofits may serve as partners to launch a device recycling and refurbishment program

Risks & Dependencies

Loaned and gifted device fleets are subject to a typical amount of loss due to wear and tear. Sustainable funding may be required to maintain County device loan fleets or device gifting fleets.

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Assess usage of current device loan programs

- Conduct an audit of existing device loan programs offered through the Fairfax County Library System to understand usage trends and fleet replenishment needs
- Conduct customer journey mapping to identify process and potential barriers for accessing existing device lending programs
- Assess current device procurement avenues

Explore County device recycling program

- Partner with local nonprofits to understand leading practices in the device recycling and refurbishment space
- Conduct feasibility study for a County recycling program

Expand existing County device fleets

- Grant additional devices to replenish and grow loaner device fleets
- Monitor impact of additional devices on digital equity metrics

Explore County-sponsored device giving program

- Conduct study to understand the feasibility of piloting a County-sponsored device giving program

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

Stakeholder engagement confirmed that several regional nonprofits, like Computer Core, are certified computer refurbishers and can serve as key partners in a County device recycling program.

As part of its Digital Equity Initiative, [Baltimore County](#) entered into an agreement with PCs for People under which the county donates surplus or retired devices to PCs for People (with hard drives removed). PCs for People refurbishes the donated government devices and distribute them to families, individuals and nonprofits. Additionally, they will sustainably recycle all non-reusable electronic waste with zero-landfill impact.



AWA1 | Prioritize inclusion and representation for the digital equity activities the County advances

Awareness



Objectives

All Fairfax County residents are thoughtfully engaged and included in digital equity efforts



Outcome Areas

Effective and Efficient Government

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff
- **Potential Partners:** Departments, Nonprofits, and Community-based Organizations (CBO)
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** The Fairfax County Digital Equity Coordination Team can oversee the operationalization and promotion of the Inclusive Engagement Framework and Language Access Policy through the lens of digital equity.



Risks & Dependencies

While the Inclusive Engagement Framework and Language Access Policy can be operationalized, the success of the County's public engagement ultimately relies on departments enacting their principles in their work

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Develop countywide guidance for inclusive digital engagement as part of an effort to operationalize the County's Inclusive Engagement Framework and enact the Language Access Policy

- Understand how Fairfax County Departments are currently using the Inclusive Engagement Framework
- Develop guides and hold training sessions to teach the County departments how to operationalize the Inclusive Engagement Framework
- Work with partners throughout the county to confirm that translation services are available and user-friendly for members of the public and for staff offering any County services
- Provide training, resources, technical assistance supports to help county departments operationalize the Language Access Policy in digital equity work

Design marketing campaign for digital inclusion

- Develop online and print marketing materials in multiple languages for dissemination
- Launch campaign across the county to promote digital inclusion
- Partner with local nonprofits to maximize reach communities with high levels of vulnerability
- Track impressions and engagement to understand what channels best reach Fairfax County residents

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

The [2024 Equity Impact Plan](#) of the Fairfax County Office of Public Affairs (OPA) describes that OPA's plans to "educate staff about the accessibility and readability of digital information so that people with disability and residents with lower literacy levels can have more equitable access to county content." OPA's Equity Impact Plan highlights that communication accessibility is a priority and a commitment, making them a key partner in improving the language access landscape for digital equity work.



AWA2 | Increase opportunities to engage in digital equity dialogue with residents across the County

Awareness



Objectives

Residents are included in shaping Fairfax County's digital landscape



Outcome Areas

Empowerment and Support for Residents facing Vulnerabilities

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff
- **Potential Partners:** Fairfax County Departments and departments, Nonprofits and Community-Based Organizations
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Fairfax County Digital Equity staff can oversee all community engagement that advances digital equity.



Risks & Dependencies

In order for residents to use the Engage Fairfax platform, they must have internet access; leaving residents without broadband subscriptions unable to fully engage in local decision-making online.

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Track existing community engagement and leverage reliable ways to gather input

- Catalogue existing community engagement forums and gatherings
- Assess which communities are being adequately engaged and what neighborhoods require additional contact

Identify county departments, ISP and nonprofit partners to co-host informational or community events

- Identify County and community partners to co-host resource fairs and invite ISPs to support enrollment in plans
- Create in-person touchpoints to solicit community feedback from those without broadband access

Maintain Fairfax County digital equity website

- Update the public-facing site to centralize digital equity resources
- Refer residents to the County's community partners who engage in digital equity work

Leverage Engage Fairfax platform

- Encourage County departments to utilize the Engage Fairfax platform when gathering community feedback
- Create an offline engagement plan for digital equity input-gathering to include populations without broadband
- Incorporate feedback gathered through County- and community-led events into County actions

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

Many peer localities maintain digital equity websites that centralize and share their digital equity resources, partners, and programs with the public. The [City of Boston](#), the [District of Columbia](#), and the [City of Seattle](#) offer particularly robust webpages that are user-friendly and may inform Fairfax County's site.

The City of Chicago has a [Resource Hub](#) on its Digital Equity site. This hub has information and flyers (in multiple languages) about ACP sign-up, IT help desks, and more. The hub has also started creating an Internet and Computer Resource map showing where various digital resources exist in the city. Organizations can add themselves to that map.



ADO1 | Determine and develop the skills residents need to fully engage online



Adoption



Objectives

Create a program that can support with digital skill training, connecting residents to digital resources



Outcome Areas

Lifelong Education and Learning

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County
- **Potential Partners:** Nonprofits
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Fairfax County will need to work with partners to develop and administer the digital skills assessment then use finding to refine the digital navigators program



Risks & Dependencies

Digital Navigator programs will require intentional socialization to develop relationships and provide services to communities in need

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Identify critical skills and create a digital skills assessment

- Utilize the Digital Equity Coordination Team to convene County departments and nonprofit partners to develop digital skills standards and a strategy for a digital skills assessment
- Utilize recognized digital skills assessment, such as NorthStar, to create a baseline for the county

Explore a digital navigator pilot program

- Once recognized as a national program, Fairfax County Government can utilize leading practices from the Digital Navigators Program to provide funding to nonprofits providing digital skills training to residents from neighborhoods with low adoption rates
- Nonprofit partners should be diverse and reflective of the communities in neighborhoods with low adoption rates
- Provide information and best practices on sharing government programs or other resources for Digital Navigators to share with program participants

Encourage a system of digital skills training to avoid silos

- Work across County departments to embed Digital Skills training into existing government services and curriculums

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

Portland's Community Digital Navigator Pilot Program is designed to help community-based organizations that are looking to start up digital navigator services. The City's Digital Inclusion Fund (DI Fund) pilot funding year is focused on experimenting with digital navigators and the training of existing or new staff to be capable of executing this role. Portland Community College has a digital navigation program to specifically help other students access affordable home internet service, devices, or digital skills training.



ADO2 | Partner with local employers to identify and build in-demand tech skills and launch a workforce development digital literacy pilot



Adoption



Objectives

Equip communities with workforce related digital skills that can be utilized to gain employment



Outcome Areas

Economic Opportunity

Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

- **Main drivers:** Fairfax County
- **Potential Partners:** Nonprofits
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Fairfax will need to work with partners to develop and administer the digital skills assessment then use finding to refine the digital navigators program



Risks & Dependencies

Close collaboration with the business community is needed to ensure that trainings are updated and sufficiently capture the skills needed to success in the digital workforce

Fairfax County's Course of Action

Conduct an analysis to identify digital skills opportunity gaps that exist in Fairfax County for high-demand jobs

- Examine labor statistics data across Fairfax County to understand the evolving employment landscape
- Interview and stakeholders to catalogue in-demand skills from local business in the county

Launch a pilot program in partnership with businesses, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations to support the recruitment and training of individuals from underrepresented groups in high demand tech jobs

- Convene a stakeholder group of local colleges, business, and community-based nonprofits to design and implement a pilot program based on best practices from peer jurisdictions for workforce development digital skills programs
- Determine resources needed to support pilot and expanded program's long-term sustainability
- Partner with local colleges and/or nonprofits to develop and offer education and training
- Collaborate with local businesses to provide work-based learning opportunities

Stakeholder Insight & Leading Practice

In 2023, North Carolina (NC) State Extension was awarded 1.3 million grant to expand its digital skills training program throughout the State. After a study by the National Skills Coalition found that 91% of jobs in North Carolina require some type of digital skill, The NC State Extension designed a digital skill education program to support workforce development, including lessons on accounting software, email marketing, and cybersecurity. The program also assisted participants in applying for government benefits and jobs.



Fairfax County will require a phased approach to socialize and collaborate with communities to implement the Action Plan

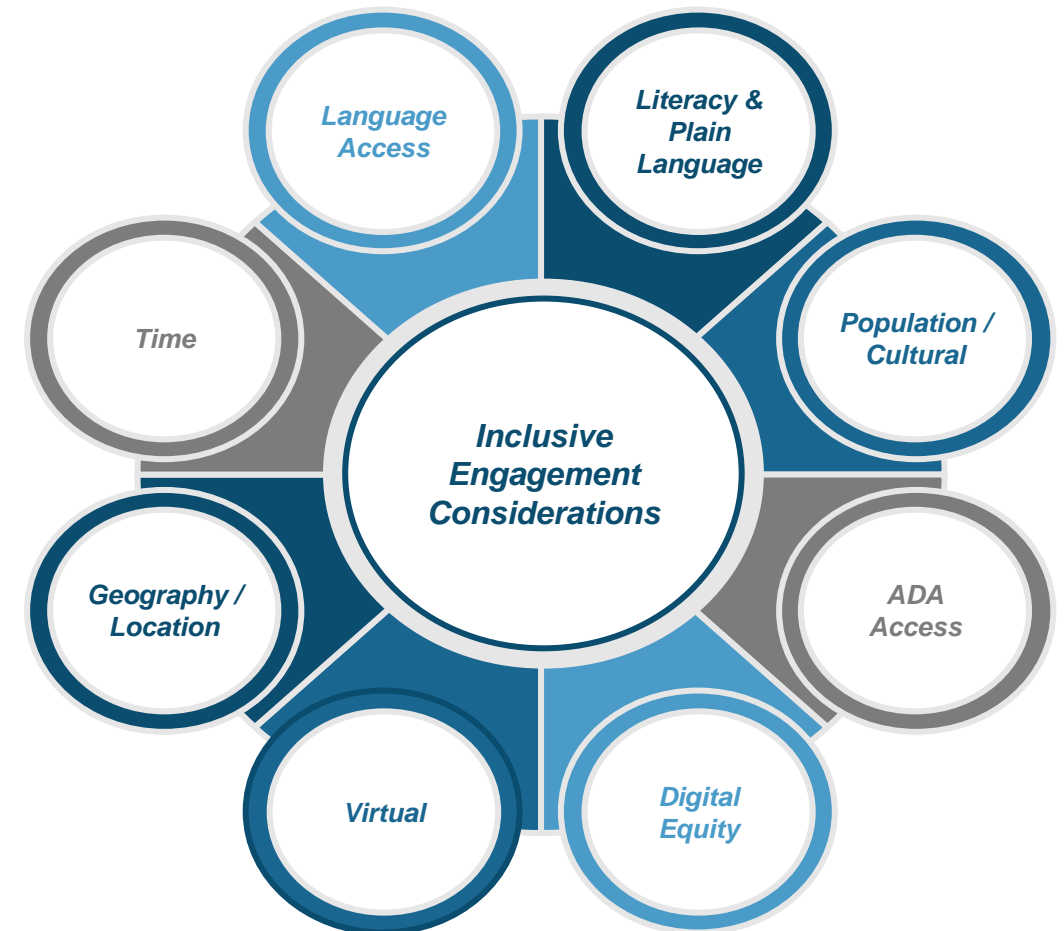
Using the guidance provided in the Inclusive Engagement Framework, deeper community and stakeholder engagement can refine the Digital Equity Action Plan as well as achieve buy-in and foster collaborative efforts to close the digital divide in Fairfax County.

This proposed Action Plan has been developed with the support and input from a wide-range of County departments and stakeholder from across the business and nonprofit community. This engagement has created initial relationships and momentum behind the Plan.

In order to further refine the proposed strategies in this Plan, the County plans to establish a governance structure (outlined on the following page) and use its Engagement Framework to engage communities and residents across the County.

While the exact mechanisms for this engagement have yet to be finalized, the proposed engagement activities include:

- The use of questionnaires on the County's Digital Equity webpage
- Listening sessions at various locations and times across the County
- Briefing materials in multiple languages
- Conducting focus groups with 8-10 individuals for more targeted conversations
- Participating in existing forums, such as fairs or other public events where community gathers
- Posting information in high traffic areas, such as bus stops or library bulletin boards
- Creating social media campaigns that can be distributed by various departments to expand reach
- Surveying the access and literacy needs of residents in County-provided programs and services

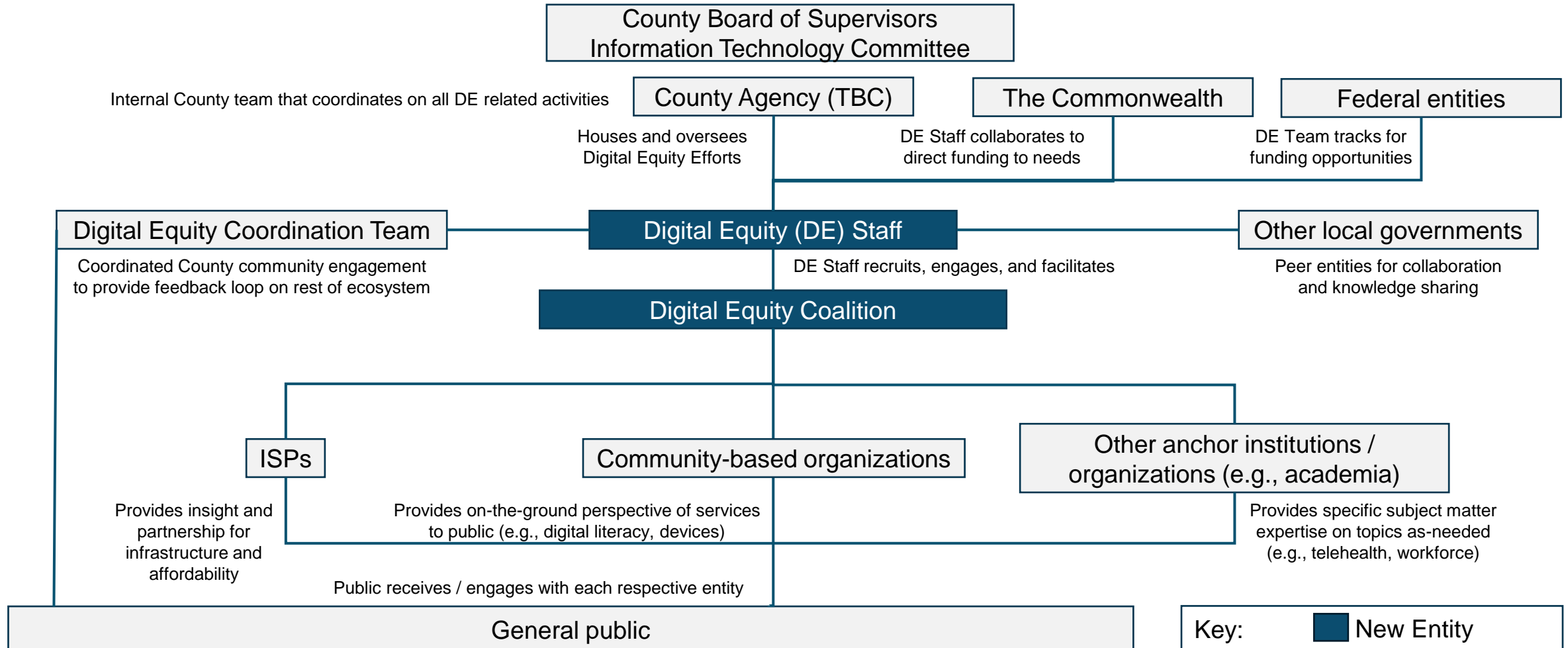


Source: Fairfax County, Inclusive Engagement Framework



Implementing the Action Plan will require activating and coordinating the stakeholder ecosystem

This demonstrates the ecosystem of partners and stakeholders who will play role in accomplishing the County's vision.

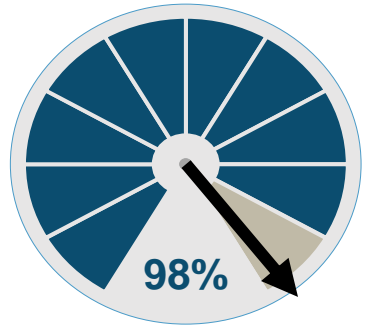




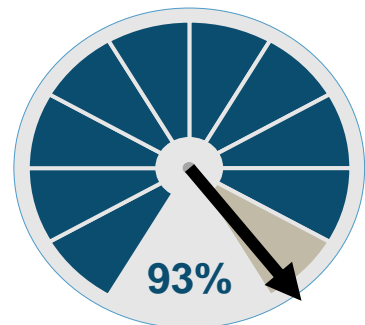
While Fairfax County will need to conduct additional research to develop a baseline, these 8 metrics will allow the county to track progress for the plan

ACCESS

% of Households with access to high-speed internet (100/20)

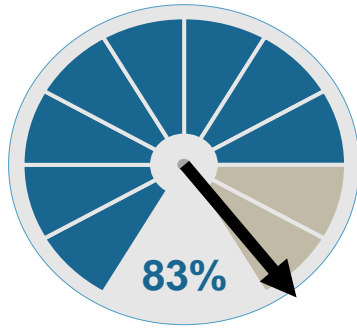


% of Households with a personal computer



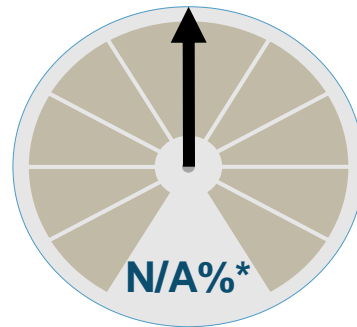
AFFORDABILITY

Broadband subscription adoption rate for low-income households**



AWARENESS

% of residents in County affordable housing are aware of digital equity tools and resources



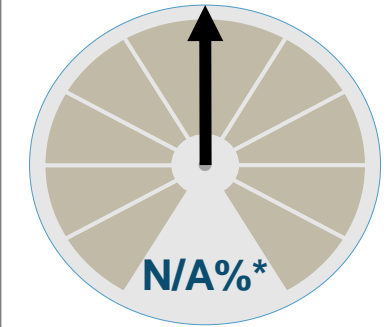
ADOPTION

Pre-and post Digital Skills assessment score

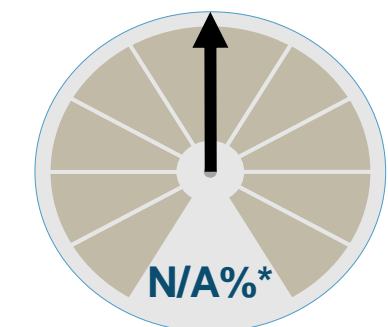


ADVANCEMENT

Track the percentage of plan progress and implementation



Sentiment survey for partners assessing how prepared they feel to implement initiatives

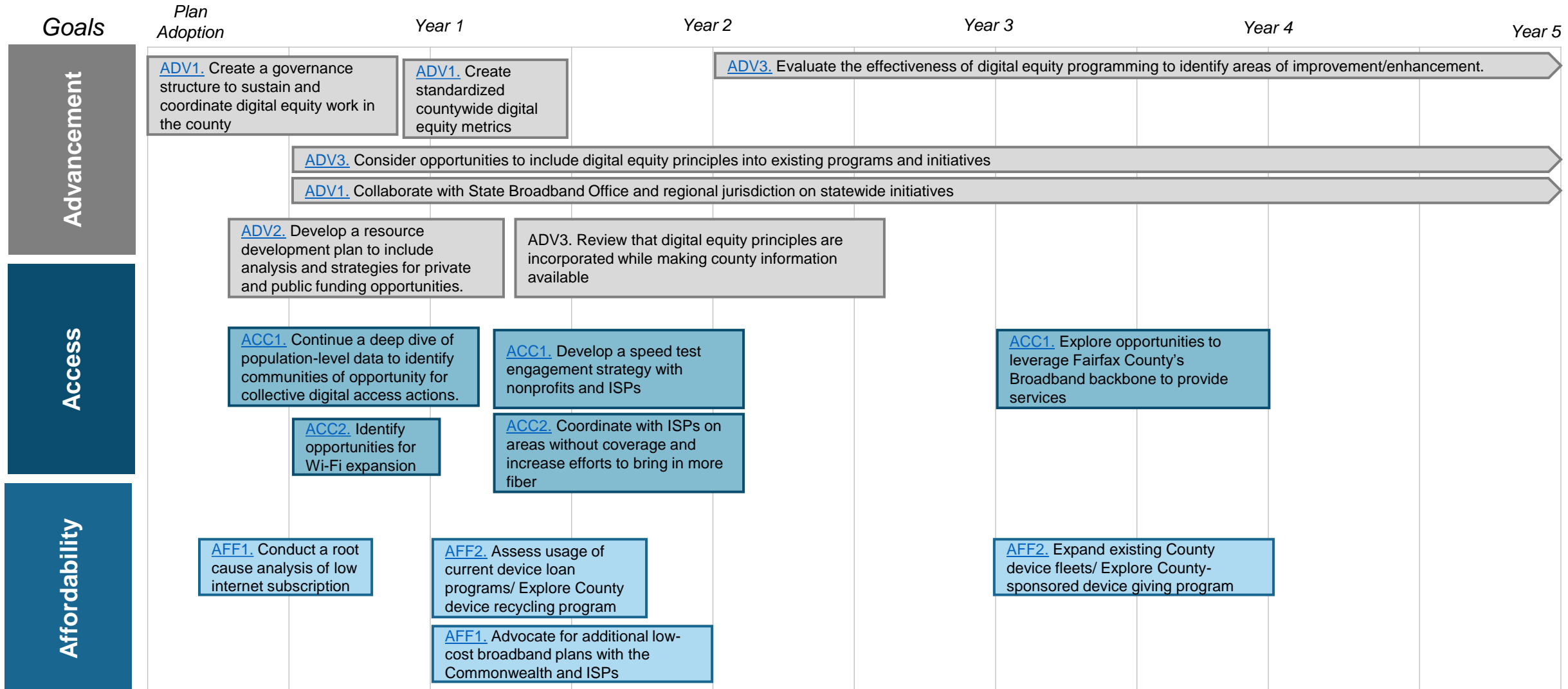


→ Targets for Progress

*A survey is needed to create a baseline
** household making less than \$20k a year

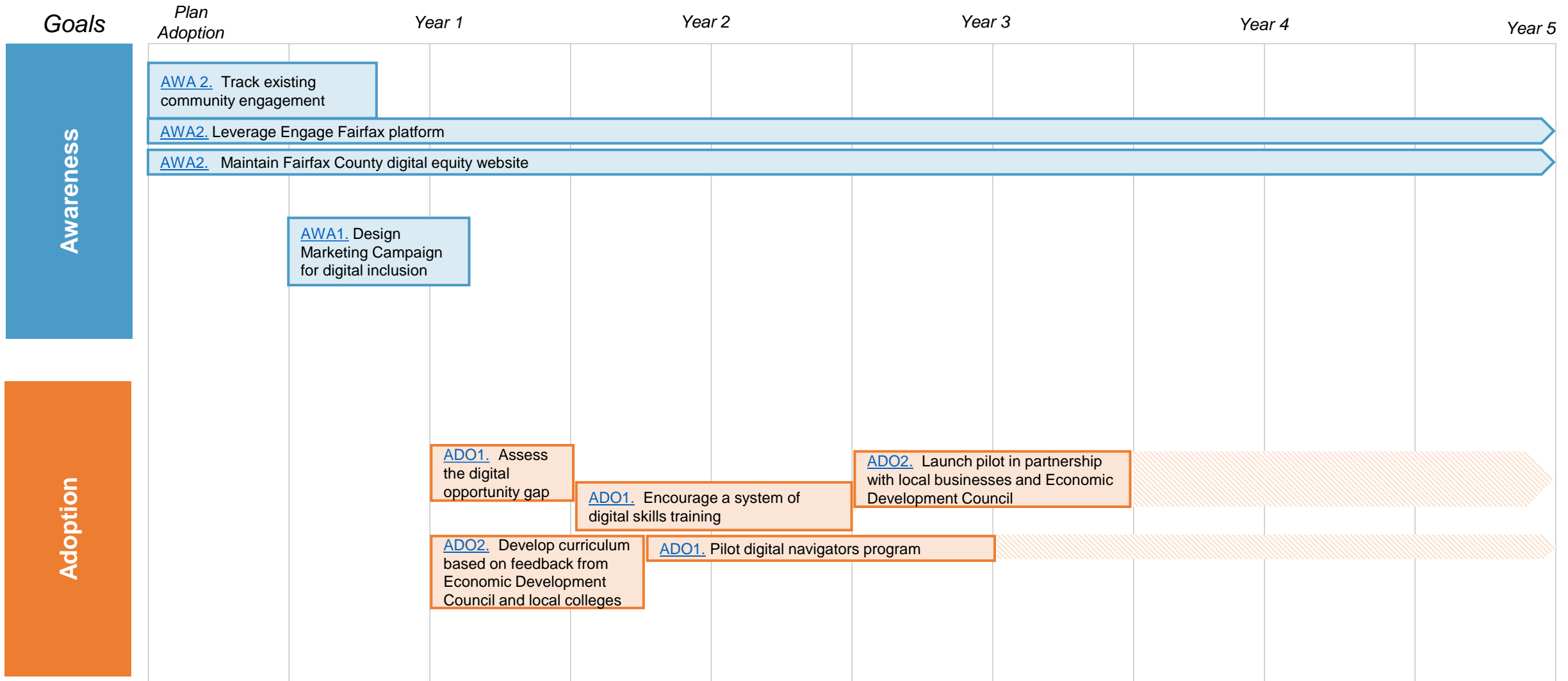


The goals identified in this plan are set to span 5 years while acknowledging data gathered through this process may lead to new action





The goals identified in this plan are set to span 5 years while acknowledging data gathered through this process may lead to new action





Call to Action

Fairfax County is committed to creating a structure that empowers and coordinates its efforts in addressing the digital needs of its residents. The County understands that this work must be driven by the voices of residents and other stakeholders impacted by digital inequities.

This plan focuses on the actions necessary to achieve the County's vision for all residents to have the resources and skills to participate and thrive in digitally-connected communities.

Fairfax is committed to using the tools available to create meaningful opportunity, and the opportunity that exists in a fully connected county is significant. Estimates range that the average consumer benefit is \$1,500 to \$2,000 per year when broadband is accessible.¹

For the 13,900 households without a broadband subscription, this benefit can relieve cost burdens they face. Access to broadband and the appropriate devices can impact employment opportunities, health outcomes, and general well-being.

The County is actively focusing on providing residents opportunities using digital tools and technology. Our critical next steps include:

Ensure that voices from communities, particularly those facing by digital inequities and have been historically excluded in planning and decision-making, have a seat at the table. This work can only be successful if communities facing difficulty with access are a part of the solutions County pursues. Considerations, such as location and time are important for inclusive participation.

Collect and leverage existing department meetings that gather community input. County departments are already in the community and provide ways for residents to participate. Encouraging feedback on digital equity, where appropriate, makes efficient use of existing meetings.

Build meaningful relationship in communities by partnering with trusted partners. Partners can help the County understand how best to market and share what residents care most about.

Ensure feedback loops are in place. Input from the community is only half of the equation. The County needs to integrate the information gathered and share how it will be used in the future.

Community input will only strengthen this plan and the County already has a framework to support the efforts in this action plan.

Action Plan & Community Input



1. [Connecting the Dots of Ohio Broadband](#)



Appendices



Appendices

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C	Current State Assessment		51-96



Stakeholder Engagement Plan





Digital equity is a core value of Fairfax County

The County is committed to investing in digital equity for all residents by ensuring equitable opportunities for all to participate and engage in a connected community.

Fairfax County

Quick Facts*

Population: 1.2M
No Fixed Broadband: 1.5% (18K households)
No Broadband or Computer: 5.1% (61.2K)

Purpose

To develop a robust Digital Equity Action Plan that reflects Fairfax County’s unique strengths and areas for growth, stakeholder and community input is paramount. This stakeholder engagement plan defines who, when, and how the project team interacted with stakeholders as part of the Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan development.

The County’s Approach to Stakeholder Engagement

To identify areas of digital opportunity within the County, stakeholders representing County agencies, nonprofit and community organizations, and internet service providers (ISPs) were engaged through interviews, office hours conversations, and leadership briefings to understand the existing digital asset landscape, digital needs, and opportunities for cross-cutting partnerships, programming, and investments to close the digital divide. Engagement occurred over a month-long period. **It is important to note that expanded, continuous engagement, including engagement of diverse community voices, is required following the development of the Digital Equity Action Plan.** The stakeholder engagement conducted during the plan development process serves as a launch pad for deeper inclusive community and stakeholder engagement.

**Census Bureau, 2015-2019 5-Year ACS Estimates*



Fairfax County engaged a myriad of stakeholders

Over 56 stakeholders were engaged as part of the Current State Assessment and the development of the Digital Equity Action Plan. The following stakeholder groups, identified by County Leadership, were engaged as part of the process.

Fairfax County Representation

- Area Agencies on Aging
- Department of Economic Initiatives
- Digital Equity Coordination Team
- Department of Cable and Consumer Services
- Department of Family Services
- Department of Health
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Department of Information Technology
- Fairfax County Public Libraries
- Office of Public Affairs

Fairfax County Representation

- Fairfax County Park Authority
- Department of Planning and Development
- Department of Public Works and Environmental Services
- Land Development Services
- Department of Neighborhood and Community Services

Education Entities

- Fairfax County Public Schools
- Northern Virginia Community College
- George Mason University

Non-profit & Community Orgs

- Boys and Girls Club of America
- Britepaths
- Computer Core
- FACETS
- Minority Tech Foundation
- ServiceSource
- United Community
- Western Fairfax Christian Ministries

Business & ISPs

- Cox Communications
- Economic Development Authority
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- T-Mobile



Fairfax County had a three-pronged approach to engagement

To better understand the Digital Equity landscape, group interviews and open and flexible “office hours” conversations were conducted with county government staff, community members, and other stakeholders in mid-November 2023. The findings were analyzed and presented as part of a briefing on the state of digital equity landscape to County government leadership in early 2024.



Interviews

Community partners, internet service providers, and county departments were engaged through in a series of interviews. These interviews were grouped by stakeholders providing similar services or serving similar populations to provide a detailed perspective of Digital Equity in Fairfax County. Grouping similar service agencies provided opportunities to **understand silos and potential areas for partnership** to implement the Digital Equity Action Plan.



Open “Office Hours”

To maximize attendance, several open “office hours” conversations were made available to the County’s digital equity stakeholders. **This flexible format allowed for additional departments, nonprofits, and internet service providers to join in the discussion** that helped to shape the Current State Assessment and that will ultimately inform the Countywide Digital Equity Action Plan.



Leadership Briefings

To validate our findings, the County held leadership briefings with several oversight leaders and groups, including the Chief Equity Officer, Deputy County Executives, and the Digital Equity Coordination Team. These conversations served as guide for the development of the Digital Equity Action Plan through shared creation of the mission, vision and goals for the **broader digital priorities in Fairfax County**.

Leadership briefings were held in early 2024.



Engagement provided context on gaps and opportunities

The County gathered information on existing resources, strategies, and partnerships that can support implementation of future digital equity recommendations. Conversations with stakeholders were fluid and evolved beyond the questions included below, as appropriate.

Representative Questions

Introduction

1. Tell us a bit about yourself, your department/organization/agency, and your role.

Infrastructure and Access

2. What, in your opinion, does the future state of broadband access look like in Fairfax County? What impact would more inclusive broadband access have on the county?

3. Does your office have any current initiatives related to digital equity, broadband internet availability, affordability, and/or device access?

Digital Literacy and Skills

4. Does your organization have any digital inclusion programs, assets, or initiatives (e.g., device lending programs, computer trainings, public Wi-Fi)? How are they measured and tracked?

5. What is working well / where are the gaps in providing digital skills to the populations you serve? .

Inclusion and Representation

6. What are the biggest digital inclusion and opportunity barriers that face that population?

7. Fairfax County has a large population of residents that speak a language at home other than English, what are some resources, tools, strategies, that your office utilizes to reach that population?

Advancement and Capacity

8. How do you use the One Fairfax policy to make decisions?

9. What are some potential initiatives or project ideas to get there?

10. What are one to three items that your agency/organization would hope to see in the Digital Equity Action Plan?



Stakeholder engagement generated robust conversation

The County gathered insights across all convenings of stakeholders. These findings informed the Current State Assessment and served as qualitative data to underpin the Digital Equity Action Plan. A summary of some of the key insights can be found below.

Representative Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

Broadband Infrastructure and Access

- Broadband access does not appear to be an issue in Fairfax County, but speeds and affordability vary based on neighborhood
- There are many device lending programs in Fairfax County, but the school-based device programs may not adequately serve parents' needs due to access restrictions
- Many organizations cited affordability as the biggest barrier to Digital Equity
- Awareness and difficulty signing up for affordable internet programs, such as the Affordable Connectivity Program, limit its usefulness for potential participants

Inclusion and Representation

- Some county departments have incorporated digital equity into 2024 departmental equity plans
- Departments were aware of the county's inclusive engagement framework, but some expressed interest in receiving additional guidance on how best to implement the framework
- There are resource limitations in providing fully accessible service, including language translations and mobile friendly webpages

Digital Literacy and Skill-Building

- For organizations that do not have dedicated digital skills programs, nonprofits do offer staff to help provide 1:1 support for residents informally
- Need for more programming geared towards parents and digital safety
- Understanding residents' need for skills can be strengthened by working with employers to identify gaps
- Meeting residents where they are and asking them directly what they need is imperative to useful digital literacy and skill building

Advancement and Capacity Building

- Desire to expand public wi-fi throughout the county
- Need for more coordination, partnerships and information sharing within the county agencies - work as a system
- Understanding the entirety of residents' journey to resources and where barrier exist related to trying to solve issues of digital equity
- As the Digital Equity Action Plan is developed, departments want clear roles and guidance to support implementation



Additional Engagement from the County

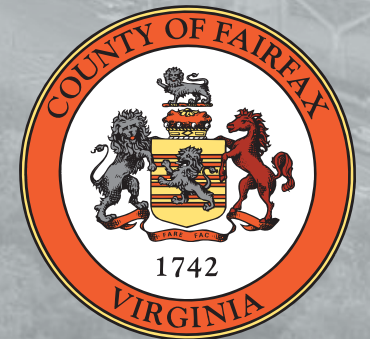
Below are additional Digital Equity efforts described in the county departmental 2023 Equity Impact Annual Reports.

Example Digital Equity Actions

- Since 2022, the Department of Information Technology (DIT) has offered the Equity Impact High School Internship Program, designed promote available county Information Technology (IT) internships for high school students from historically marginalized or underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. The program provides interns with opportunities that expose them to the many technical facets of IT as well as other critical topics such as the importance of considering equity in their roles.
- Through a partnership with AT&T and the Minority Tech Foundation (MTF) to distribute 150 AT&T-donated laptops to county residents to eliminate barriers to digital access, the Department of Family Services (DFS) received 75 laptops via MTF for distribution to Employment Services participants. Distribution began in September 2023 to participants in any Employment Service program who need a device to search for jobs and access job training programs.
- The Public Assistance and Employment Services (PAES) division, in partnership with DIT and the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), distributed 60 Chromebooks to clients participating in the Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW) program who lacked a device to conduct job searches or complete online skills training. This equipment allowed VIEW participants greater access to education and training, and employment opportunities with 72% of the participants who received a Chromebook completing job skills training within the first few months.
- To increase access and opportunity, the Employment Services program has begun offering basic digital literacy training workshops to interested job seekers via the county one-stop job centers. In addition, a contract with the Computer CORE nonprofit organization delivers customized intermediate level digital skills training including MS Office training to job seekers 55 and over. These monthly workshops are available to job seekers in the Senior Community Service Employment Program who need to update their computer skills to compete for employment.
- The Domestic and Sexual Violence Services (DSVS) division within DFS continues to support digital equity and mitigate barriers to digital access by providing cell phones and data plans to the clients they serve based on need.
- The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) continues to make progress on its goal to provide education and resources to county website publishers that the Fairfax County website must be accessible to everyone and in compliance with the United States Access Board's 5087 of the Rehabilitation Act. OPA provides educational resources, particularly through a refreshed Web Content Resource Center that features web accessibility information. In addition, OPA continued to coordinate several in-person training sessions in 2023 to train web content publishers and related staff on how to create web accessible content.



Leading Practice Findings Report



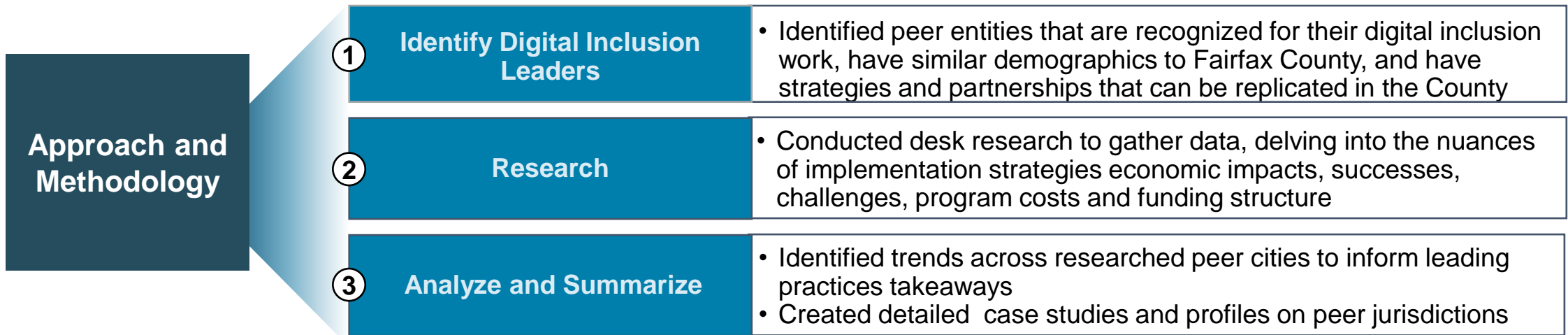


Summary | Purpose and Approach

To guide the development of the Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan, peer jurisdictions were assessed for their digital equity initiatives to identify trends relevant to the County.

Purpose and Scope

This report highlights four peer cities and counties exemplifying leading practices in digital equity. Peer cities and counties were selected with a focus on four Digital Equity Success Metrics National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA) recognition for digital inclusion work, and demographics comparative to Fairfax County. Particularly, we highlighted innovative strategies and partnerships, their impact, challenges, metrics, and funding structure. Fairfax County can use this report to determine replicable strategies in pursuit of its mission of closing the digital divide.





Summary | *Leading Practice Evaluation Framework*

The following four jurisdictions were identified as leading peers based on their exemplary efforts across four key success indicators.

Peer Cities and Counties



Philadelphia, PA



City and County of San Francisco, CA



Seattle, WA



San Antonio, TX and Bexar County

Digital Equity Success Indicators



Community-led program development

The city or county used inclusive strategies and tools to engage with the community to better understand and meet their needs.



Cohesive Digital Ecosystem

The city or county has a robust network of partners to engage and deliver digital equity services and tools.



Sustainable funding

The City or County has kept program costs low or has found long-term, sustainable funding.



Reasonable metric tracking

Realistic and measurable program metrics have been established for tracking at long- and short-term levels.



Summary | Peer City Success Indicators

The peer jurisdictions were evaluated against specific success indicators to better identify replicable strategies.

Success Indicators	Leading Peer Cities	Peer Strategies
Community-led program development	City and County of San Francisco ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Francisco Digital Equity offers community-based Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) enrollment clinics hosted by several nonprofit partners throughout the County and City. Additionally, residents of low-income housing developments were engaged to develop the Fiber to Housing program, and they are continually invited to join in digital literacy trainings offered at their residences.
Cohesive Digital Ecosystem	City of Philadelphia ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through public/private partnerships, the city of Philadelphia was able to provide broadband to over 23,000 Pre-k-12th grade students and their families. The program leveraged and coordinated resources from other city agencies to provide additional city resources, including ACP enrollments and access to devices.
Sustainable funding	City of San Antonio and Bexar County ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The San Antonio and Greater Bexar County Digital Inclusion Plan includes an extremely thorough assessment of the current and projected broadband funding landscape in the region, identifying sources of sustainable financial support for infrastructure and digital equity initiatives. These funding sources are mapped across eligible recipient organizations and departments and are incorporated into a City and County-wide digital implementation timeline.
Metric tracking	City of Seattle ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seattle created a public equity dashboard to track the progress of their Digital Navigator’s program, highlighting achievements for the program. The dashboard follows the City’s Digital Equity Plan to share progress on strategies and goals annually.

- <https://sf.gov/fiber-housing-program>
- <https://www.phila.gov/programs/phlconnected/>
- <https://www.sadigitalconnects.com/roadmap>
- <https://www.seattle.gov/tech/reports-and-data/internet-for-all/internet-for-all-seattle-dashboards>



Methodology | *Peer City Criteria*

The following criteria was used to identify peer cities and counties for the leading practice research.

Initial leading practices criteria:

1. **Fairfax County preferences:** Fairfax requested Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in our analysis
2. **Demographic criteria:**
 - Population size (must be close to a minimum of 600k), age, race, household size, and Gini coefficient for income inequality
 - Indicators from the Fairfax County Vulnerability Index, including median household income, and languages spoken other than English were also included
3. **NDIA recognition for digital inclusion work:**
 - Annually, NDIA recognizes localities as digital inclusion trailblazers¹. The NDIA 2022 list of trailblazers consisted of 32 selected localities
 - NDIA requires trailblazer applications to provide documentation that they met one or more of the following indicators: (1) having dedicated digital inclusion staff, (2) a plan, (3) governmental participation in a coalition, (4) conduction of survey research, (5) direct government funding commitments for initiatives, and/or (6) taking steps to increase home broadband affordability

1. Source: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/digital-inclusion-trailblazers/>



Methodology | Peer City List

Based on the criteria, four cities and counties were selected for the leading practice assessment.

Most like Fairfax County







★ Selected for analysis

Local government		Population	Geo size in mi ²	Median Age	Youth, 18 & Under	Elder, 62 & Over	Race, White	Race, Black or African American	Race, Asian	Race, Hispanic or Latino	Language, other than English	Average Household Size	Median Household Income	Gini Index of Income Inequality	NDIA 2022 Trailblazer	Digital Inclusion Coalition	Number of similarities
0	Fairfax County, VA	1.1M	406	38.3	23.5%	17%	56.6%	9.8%	20%	16.4%	38.7%	2.85	\$1334K	.4312			-
1	Washington D.C	680K	68.35	34.3	18.3%	12.2	45.2%	47.2%	5.6%	11.3%	4.2%	2.10	\$93K	.5111			0
2	City of San José, CA	1M	181.4	37.5	21.9%	16.3%	34.8%	3%	37.5%	31%	57.9%	3.08	\$125K	0.451			2
3	Los Angeles County, CA	10M	4,751	37	21.6%	17%	43.7%	7.9%	14.8%	48.7%	55.8%	2.94	\$76K	0.496		✓	3
4	City of Long Beach, CA	470K	80.35	35.9	21.4%	15.5%	47%	12.1%	13%	43.9%	46%	2.69	\$71K	0.460	✓	✓	1
5	City of Los Angeles, CA	3.9M	502	36.2	20.3%	16%	44.9%	8.6%	11.7%	48.4%	58.1%	2.75	\$70K	0.524			4
★6	City and County of San Francisco, CA	870K	46.87	38.7	13.6%	19.2%	43.4%	5.2%	34.4%	15.4%	42.7%	2.34	\$126K	0.511	✓	✓	5
7	City of Boston, MA	670K	89.63	32.6	15.7%	14.7%	50.1%	23.5%	9.7%	19.8%	36.6%	2.3	\$82K	0.535	✓	✓	2
8	City of New York, NY	8.7M	472.43	37.3	20.9%	18.4%	39.8%	23.4%	14.2%	28.9%	47.9%	2.63	\$71K	0.548	✓		2
9	City of Portland, OR	650K	145	37.9	17.2%	16.7%	73.8%	5.6%	8.5%	10.3%	18.5%	2.26	\$78K	0.473	✓	✓	2
★10	City of Philadelphia, PA	1.6M	141.7	34.8	21.8%	17.2%	38.5%	40.8%	7.4%	15.4%	23.7%	2.4	\$53K	0.517	✓	✓	2
11	City of Austin, TX	945K	790.1	33.9	19.5%	12%	66.4%	7.7%	8.2%	33.1%	30.5%	2.28	\$79K	0.477	✓	✓	2
12	City of Dallas, TX	1.3M	385.9	33.1	24.8%	13.6%	53.8%	24%	3.5%	42%	42.4%	2.49	\$58K	0.528	✓		4
★13	Bexar County and City of San Antonio, TX	1.4M	1,256	33.9	24.6%	15.4%	64%	6.5%	3%	65.7%	41.7%	2.64	\$55K	0.463	✓	✓	4
★14	City of Seattle, WA	730K	83.78	35.3	14.5%	15.1%	64.9%	6.8%	16.3%	7.2%	22.1%	2.08	\$105K	0.482	✓	✓	2

Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles



Case Study 1 | San Francisco County and City, California

Peer City/County	City Management	Key Demographic Statistics			
San Francisco, CA	Multiple Offices	 Population: 815K	 Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality: 0.49	 Non-English Language Spoken: 42.7%	 Fixed Broadband Connection: 90.6%
Key Takeaways			Relevant Digital Equity Success Indicators		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Francisco is offering Wi-Fi as a free public service in high-traffic areas, leveraging City and partner infrastructure to make broadband connection more available to residents. Creative approaches to digital literacy education are being explored in the Dev/Mission program. Digital literacy is expanded beyond basic education and encompasses skill-building in advanced technologies and career mentorship. 			 Community-led development	 Cohesive Digital Ecosystem	
Digital Equity Summary			Strategies & Initiatives To Consider		
<p>Accessibility: Fiber to Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Fiber to Housing program offers free Internet delivered through fiber-optic and Ethernet cabling in every housing unit across 19 multi-unit dwellings throughout the County. <p>Infrastructure: Public Wi-Fi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2014, the Department of Technology began providing free Wi-Fi along the Market Street corridor, in the Civic Center, and select Rec and Park properties. <p>Digital Literacy: Dev/Mission Program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dev/Mission is a partnership with tech companies and their employees to bridge the diversity gap in tech by offering mentorship, internship and apprenticeship opportunities, and corporate site visits. <p>Affordability: ACP Enrollment Clinics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Francisco Digital Equity offers community-based ACP enrollment clinics hosted by several nonprofit partners throughout the County and City. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Francisco has 26% enrollment rate for ACP Offer public Wi-Fi hotspots for residents in metropolitan centers Foster partnerships with public housing complexes to ensure connectivity and digital literacy offerings Examine digital literacy programming to extend skills beyond device basics and encourage participation in the technology sector and workforce Expand the physical footprint and frequency of community-based ACP enrollment clinics 		

Data populated by the US Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles; ACP Enrollment data obtained from <https://www.sf.gov/connectsanfrancisco>



Case Study 1 | San Francisco County and City, California

Fiber to Housing

- The [Fiber to Housing Program](#) is a public-private partnership between the San Francisco Department of Technology, the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development, and Monkeybrains, a local ISP. Together, these three entities collaborate to **provide free broadband connections for over 8,000 units in San Francisco low-income housing developments.**
- The Department of Technology builds and connects fiber to Minimum Point of Entry (MPOE) or to street enclosures. Following the preliminary infrastructure wiring, the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development works with **a contractor to apply wiring standard in the buildings.** The Fiber to Housing Program hands out wireless routers to residents and the local ISP is tasked with supplying switches and operates internet to connect at the data center.
- Some housing developments offer wired broadband connections, while others provide public Wi-Fi networks for residents.
- The program seeks to, wherever possible, **provide a service that's of equivalent or higher speed and quality as the best commercial service.**
- The Fiber to Housing program is solidified as a key Approach tactic in the City and County’s 2019-2024 Digital Equity Strategic Plan. This tactic supports Goal 1 of the Plan, which pertains to Access.
- Additionally, the City and County’s Digital Equity Strategic Plan establishes the expectation that **all newly constructed or renovated units should have inside wiring capable of connecting to high-speed Internet** from multiple providers, promoting greater choice and affordability.



Funding Structure & Impact








- \$12.5 M was the projected budget for the Fiscal Year 21/22.
- Altogether, the city estimates the project will provide a service benefit of some **\$400 million over 20 years.**
- Direct benefits from the programs include:
 - Reducing the cost of broadband service for internet providers and customers
 - New points of presence for ISPs based on where public fiber terminates
 - Encourages construction of public fiber to low-income areas
 - Increased command to reach families and students in need of devices

Current Status

- The Fiber to Housing Program currently provides free or low-cost internet to over 8,000 units across 57 locations in San Francisco.
- In 2023, the Department of Technology's work on the Fiber to Housing program was recognized by SPUR for public managerial excellence and good government practices.
- The Fiber to Housing team expects to bring another 5,700 units online before the end of the fiscal year, increasing the total inventory of connected units by over 40%.



Case Study 2 | City of San Antonio and Bexar County, Texas

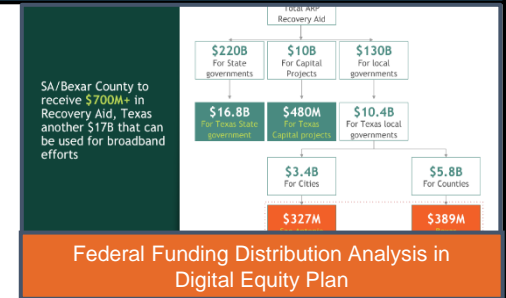
Peer City/County	City Management	Key Demographic Statistics		
San Antonio, TX	Office of Innovation	 Population: 1.45M	 Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality: 0.58	 Non-English Language Spoken: 41.7%  Fixed Broadband Connection: 84.8%
Key Takeaways		Relevant Digital Equity Success Indicators		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The City of San Antonio commits considerable resources to the advancement of digital equity initiatives and supports a well-staffed team to drive connectivity efforts forward. A myriad of funding sources, their longevity, and applicability to digital equity initiatives are considered in the San Antonio and Greater Bexar County Digital Equity Plan. Public sharing of broadband metrics creates a system of accountability for the implementation of connectivity and digital literacy initiatives. 		 Reasonable Metric-Tracking	 Cohesive Digital Ecosystem	 Sustainable Funding
Digital Equity Summary		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Antonio has a 58% ACP Enrollment rate Develop a comprehensive sustainability strategy to ensure that digital equity programming will be adequately funded in the years to come Hire dedicated staff members to advance the digital equity efforts in the County and liaise with community partners to expand digital offerings Ensure that digital equity initiatives have a dedicated place in the organizational structure of the County Develop a public-facing method of metric tracking, such as an Impact Dashboard 		
<p>Advancement: Digital Inclusion Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The City of San Antonio dedicates significant City funds towards the advancement of digital equity goals. Two full-time staff members lead the Digital Inclusion Team: a Digital Inclusion Administrator and a Digital Inclusion Coordinator. <p>Funding: SA Digital Connects Funding Opportunity Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The San Antonio and Greater Bexar County Digital Plan includes an extremely thorough assessment of the current and projected broadband funding landscape in the region, identifying sources of sustainable financial support for infrastructure and digital equity initiatives. <p>Metrics: Impact Dashboards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SA Digital Connects, in partnership with the City of San Antonio, developed a three-pronged, publicly-available Impact Dashboard that tracks metrics associated with access, affordability, and adoption rates. 				



Case Study 2 | San Antonio and Bexar County, Texas

Digital Equity Plan Funding Sustainability Analysis








- In August of 2021, the City of San Antonio and the Greater Bexar County published a **comprehensive Digital Inclusion Plan** that outlined the County and City’s vision for digital equity and established a five-year implementation plan to achieve its goals.
- A central piece of the Inclusion Plan was their **funding sustainability analysis which detailed actionable steps the City and County can take to secure financial support for broadband and digital initiatives.**
- The authors of the report segmented funding across two buckets: an initial 3-year investment and ongoing annual funding maintenance. In their analysis, they determined that San Antonio and Greater Bexar County required an estimated investment of \$600M over the next 3 years and \$90M annually thereafter is needed to close the digital divide.
- **Funding sources were further assessed by their distribution channels and eligible recipients** to inform a cohesive funding strategy that optimizes the amount of dollars allocated to digital initiatives.
- Operational tactics for departments to adhere to were paired with each funding source. For example, the City and County recognized that partnership with community-based organizations (CBOs) will drive Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program awareness and adoption and support Independent School Districts (ISDs) to implement E-rate programming and funding.



Funding Structure & Impact	Current Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Funding Sustainability Analysis assessed the funding landscape available to the City of San Antonio and Greater Bexar County. The identified funding sources included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal and State recovery programs • State broadband office funds • City/County operating show • Municipal bonds • Philanthropy / NGOs • Private Sector / Foundations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The San Antonio / Greater Bexar County Digital Inclusion Plan was published in August 2021. • The implementation timeline established in the Digital Inclusion Plan extends until 2025 and upon its completion, the City and County may elect to develop a new Plan. • The City and Greater Bexar County are currently in the process of securing funding for the advancement of initiatives outlined in the Plan.



Case Study 3 | City of Seattle, Washington

Peer City/County	City Management	Key Demographic Statistics		
Seattle, Washington	Seattle Information Technology	 Population: 730K	 Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality: 0.482	 Non-English Language Spoken: 22.1%  Fixed Broadband Connection: 92.9%
Key Takeaways		Relevant Digital Equity Success Indicators		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2020, Seattle created the Internet for All in Seattle with the goal of enabling Seattle residents to access and adopt broadband that is reliable and affordable. Since 2020, Seattle has supported more than 20K households in accessing subsidized home internet through the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Seattle has also increased device distribution and digital skills learning through their digital navigator programs and partnership with Seattle Public Schools. 		 Reasonable Metric-Tracking	 Community-led development	 Sustainable funding
Digital Equity Summary		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seattle has enrolled more than 24,000 households in ACP, a 29% rate of enrollment Including Digital Equity focused indicators on the existing vulnerability dashboard. Fund trusted community organizations to provide digital skills training to vulnerable populations. Releasing regular progress reports focused on accomplishments in closing the digital divide. Funding community-led digital equity programming through grants. 		
<p>Metrics: Internet for all in Seattle Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2020, as a response to COVID-19 pandemic, Seattle created the Internet for All in Seattle Action plan. The plan included 4 objectives with short- and long-term actions focused working with community organizations, building decided website for existing on increasing and improving access for households with students, increasing access to devices for the underserved and increasing internet adoption in Seattle, with emphasis on households with annual income under \$25,000. To measure and share progress on these objectives, Seattle released a second Internet for All in Seattle report in 2022 and created a location-based public Dashboard. <p>Sustainability: Technology Matching Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The city of Seattle has administered the Technology Matching Fund grant since 1997. The grant is intended to support projects that increase digital literacy skills including trainings and technical support and improve access to the internet through expanding Wi-fi to low-income Seattle residents. 				



Case Study 3 | City of Seattle, Washington

Technology Fund Grant

- Seattle’s Technology Matching Grant Program has **awarded more than \$7 million** since the program started in 1997.
- The Program matches city dollars with community contributions of **volunteer labor, professional services and material, and community resources**.
- To be eligible for the Technology grants, projects must address one of the following priority areas:
 - Digital literacy classes or workshops
 - Distribution of devices
 - Providing internet connectivity
 - Providing digital navigator services
- Programs are intended to service vulnerable communities with past grants supporting computer labs for justice-involved individuals, device loaning and coding programs for low-income and Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students in Seattle, and many programs with local libraries and nonprofits geared toward communities with limited English.



Technology Match Grant Program Computer Lab

Funding Structure & Impact








- The City allocates \$545,000 each year with each organization eligible for \$35,000 grant.
- In order to receive the grant, the organization must allocate a 25% community match.
 - Community matches can be cash, volunteer match with volunteer hours valued at \$35 per hour, or in-kind match, such as computers, furniture or other resources from the organizations.
 - Communities cannot use grants from other city projects to supplement their match.
- Through this program more than 17,000 Chromebook and laptops, more than 96,000 cellphones, and 26,000 internet hotspots have been distributed in Seattle.
- The program has signed up more than 17,000 low-income households for discounted internet service through local internet providers.

Current Status

- Seattle awarded 18 organizations with grants in June 2023, totaling \$545,000.
- Community match contributions were valued at \$135,000.
- Many of the grantees are community-based organizations that work with vulnerable communities such as English language learner, low-income communities, seniors, and justice-involved individuals.



Case Study 4 | City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Peer City/County	City Management	Key Demographic Statistics			
Philadelphia, PA	Office of Innovation and Technology	 Population: 1.6M	 Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality: 0.517	 Non-English Language Spoken: 23.7%	 Fixed Broadband Connection: 83.1%
Key Takeaways			Relevant Digital Equity Success Indicators		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While the City of Philadelphia has a number of digital equity initiatives related to offering devices, public Wi-Fi, and digital navigator services, their 2022 Digital Equity plan emphasizes the need for city leaders and external partners to create and support a digital inclusion ecosystem. This includes establishing revenue-generating streams that will ensure long-term sustainability of the programs. The ecosystem also seeks to support digital equity efforts through integrating digital equity strategies into the existing work of city agencies, such as the Health Department and local schools, and working with the private sector to financially support community-based organizations. 			 Reasonable Metric-Tracking	 Cohesive Digital Ecosystem	 Sustainable Funding
Digital Equity Summary			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philadelphia has a 52% ACP enrollment rate Develop a comprehensive sustainability strategy to that supports adequate funding for digital equity programming Integrate digital equity services into existing city supports, such as school and health systems Develop a public-facing method of metric tracking, such as an annual reports 		
<p>Cohesive Ecosystem: PHLConnectED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The city of Philadelphia has an initiative to support families with children in Pre-K through 12th grade with access to free or low costs internet. This includes providing support to families applying for ACP and other government resources and utilizing digital navigator programs. <p>Sustainable Funding: Improving Health Equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In an effort to create more sustainable, long-term initiatives, the City of Philadelphia has created a Digital Health Equity Task force to support health care workers to create systems that will support long term use of digital health tools like TeleHealth. <p>Metrics: Annual Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2020 The City of Philadelphia published a report to understand needs and barriers in accessing internet for households in Philadelphia. The report serves as a baseline assessment for ongoing Digital Equity work within the City. Over the next 5 years, the City of Philadelphia plans to release an annual survey that accurately evaluates programs and progress towards improving digital equity. 					



Case Study 4 | City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

PHLConnectED

- PHLConnectED is a partnership between the City of Philadelphia, the School district of Philadelphia, private businesses and philanthropic partners **investing \$17 million** to provide **free internet to pre-K to 12th grade students and their households**.
- The program began prior to the pandemic in an effort to connect students to high-speed internet. With the introduction of ACP, the program has expanded to support all Philadelphia households with getting connected to the internet.
- PHLConnectED supports families with assistance signing up for the Affordable Connectivity Program, access to classes and digital skills training. Parents are also able to participate in multi-lingual digital skills trainings at partner institutions such as Temple University.
- The program is intended to create an ecosystem of support from families through connecting families with Digital Navigation services that assist in understanding ACP eligibility and signing up for other city resources.



Children participating in the PHLConnectED program

Funding Structure & Impact

- The program is funded through the City's Public and Private Partnership office using a COVID-19 emergency funding through the federal government and donations from local foundations, Comcast, and other local contributions.
- The programs supports 23,100 pre-K-12th grade students and their households.
- The internet service for the program was initially funded through private sources but transitioned to utilizing ACP in 2023.
 - To support this transitions, the City in partnership with the school districts created an awareness campaign to increase enrollment in ACP.

Current Status

- The program is sill currently serving students and their families, however potential cuts to ACP will force the program to utilize other funding sources to continue providing low-cost internet for families in needs



Fairfax County
Digital Equity Current State Assessment
Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan

January 4, 2024



The Current State Assessment depicts the present state of the digital equity landscape in Fairfax County, Virginia

This Current State Assessment builds a baseline understanding of digital equity across the County. The Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan will build upon the strengths and address areas of need identified in this assessment in order to close the digital divide in Fairfax County.

The Current State Assessment...

Context	defines the analytical framework that Fairfax County applies when understanding digital equity
	outlines the current digital assets Fairfax County offers
Analysis	describes areas of opportunity that require additional investment and Countywide focus
	details digital equity leading practices from peer localities
	captures the perspectives of the County's digital equity stakeholders
Synthesis	offers analytical takeaways that will inform the Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan



Fairfax County, Virginia



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Executive Summary



Digital equity is central to a thriving Fairfax County where residents can confidently engage with the online world

Fairfax County's commitment to digital equity enables residents to be responsible digital citizens and engage with online platforms and information in a thoughtful way. By closing the digital divide, the County will be prepared to adapt to the ever-changing digital landscape.

Fairfax's Equity Ecosystem

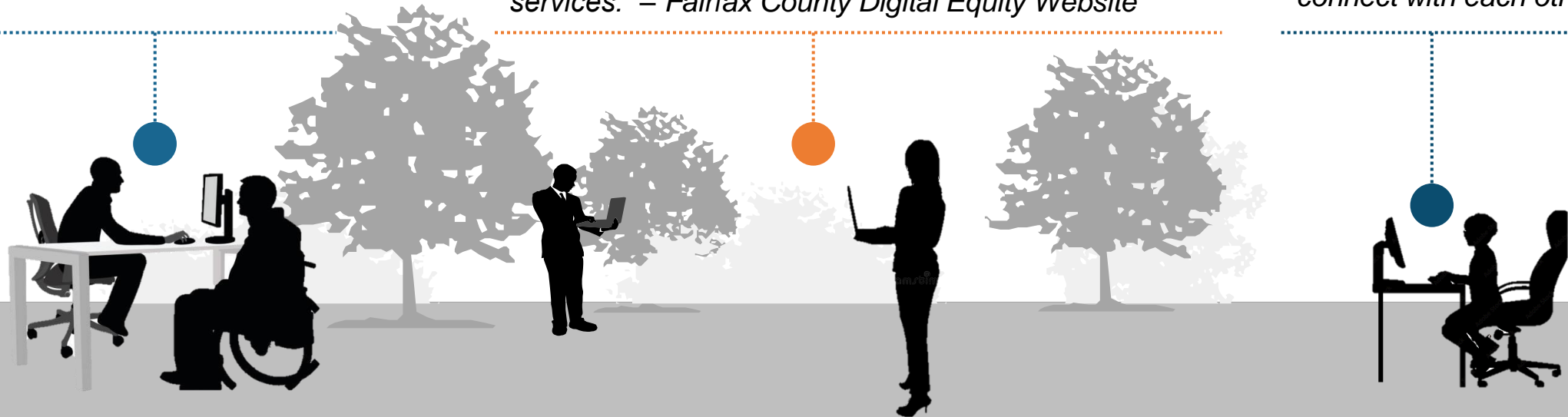
Equity is a core value of Fairfax County. One Fairfax, the County's racial and social equity policy, and the Countywide Strategic Plan create an environment in which attention, resources, and programming are strategically directed to ensure that all residents have an equitable opportunity to succeed.

Defining Digital Equity

"Digital Equity ensures opportunities for Fairfax County residents to participate and engage in a connected community. The ability to access, understand and use digital tools is essential for many tasks in modern life, including applying for jobs, paying bills, enjoying recreational activities, completing homework, staying informed and connecting with government/community services." – Fairfax County Digital Equity Website

A Connected Future

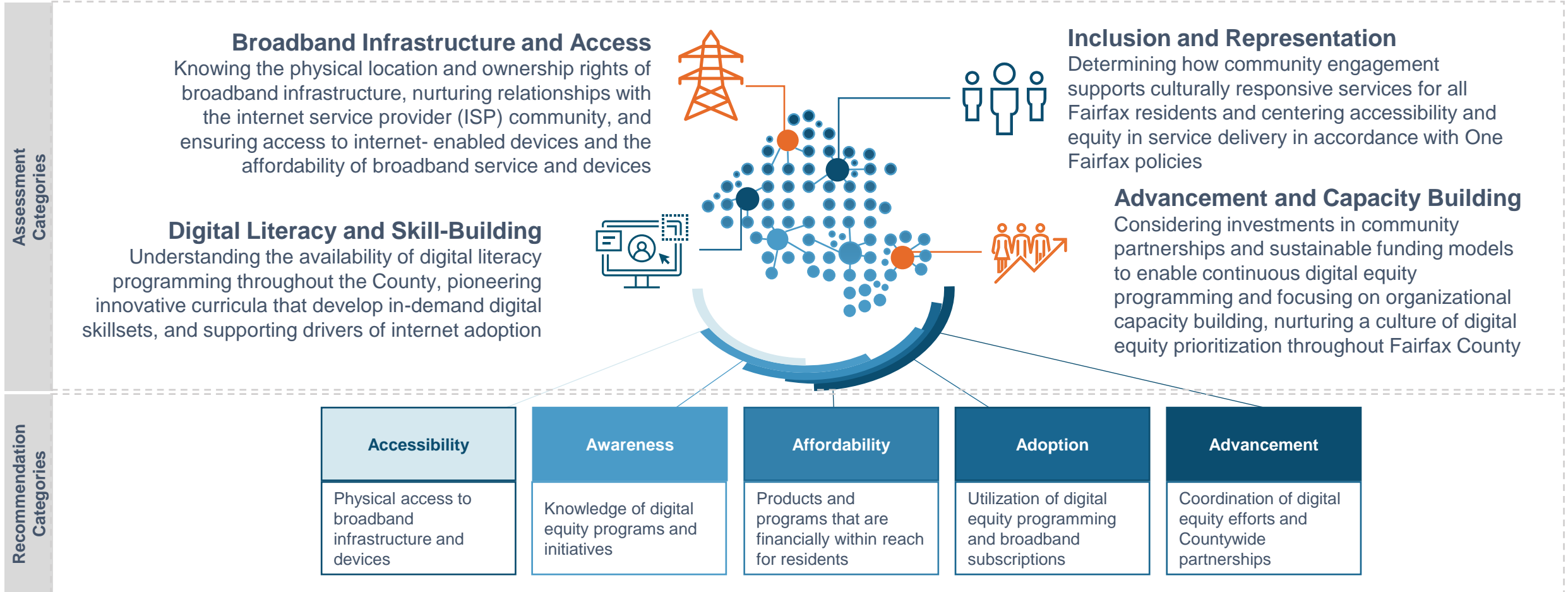
The digital landscape is evolving at an exponential rate. A digitally ready Fairfax community will be well-equipped to adapt to changes in the economy and ways in which people connect with each other.





Digital equity in Fairfax County can be assessed by reviewing components across the following categories

Bridging the digital divide is a nuanced challenge that requires a common understanding in order to facilitate partnership between stakeholders, County officials, and community members. This framework provides a guide to analyze Fairfax County’s digital equity landscape.





Nearly 14,000 Fairfax County households lack a broadband subscription – they face compounding barriers to access

The County's commitment to infrastructure is demonstrated in its overall high rate of coverage, those without access face additional barriers that require more resources and Countywide attention to address.

Fairfax County's broadband infrastructure provides a strong foundation for its residents, serving nearly 98% of households with wired broadband.¹ For the locations that remain unserved or underserved, infrastructure and wiring within older buildings make accessibility a significant concern for residents. Additionally, **locations with lower-than-average broadband access are also located in census tracts with high vulnerability scores based on the Fairfax County Vulnerability Index.** Efforts to address this must focus on understanding what populations experience the most physical barriers to connectivity and what are those physical barriers.

The State has listed 2,267 Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) in Fairfax County, but only 77 of them have gigabit symmetrical service.² These CAIs are concentrated in the northern part of the County. **Increasing the number of CAIs with gigabit service can help the nearly 14,000 households who do not have broadband service readily available in the home.**³ These households tend to fall into the 'High' and "Very High" categories of the Fairfax County Vulnerability Index, which is a composite measure of demographic indicators that highlights geographical areas with increased needs.

Beyond coverage, stakeholders also emphasize that affordability is a major barrier to connectivity. **The County is committed to ensuring that broadband service and device access is within the financial reach of all Fairfax residents.** A key federal program that helps to alleviate the monetary burden of broadband is the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). The County has seen an uptick in eligible household enrollment, increasing from 22% in April 2023 to 30% by February 2024.⁵ *Note: Due to a lack of additional funding from Congress, the ACP stopped accepting new applications as of February 7, 2024.*

By The Numbers



3.3%

13.9K Fairfax County households lack broadband subscription



1.6%

6.8K Fairfax County households lack a computing device



30%

26.75K eligible Fairfax County households enrolled in ACP*

Unserved and Underserved Locations

An unserved location is defined by the NTIA as a broadband-serviceable location that the Broadband DATA Maps show as having no access to broadband service, or lacking access to Reliable Broadband Service offered with a speed ≥ 25 Mbps for downloads; and a speed ≥ 3 Mbps for uploads; and latency ≤ 100 mbps. Underserved locations are, definitionally, not unserved locations and lack access to a speed ≥ 100 Mbps for downloads; and a speed ≥ 20 Mbps for uploads.⁶

¹Federal Communications Commission (2023) Fixed Broadband Map | ²VA DHCD (2023) Broadband Availability Map | ³Census Bureau (2022) ACS Table S2801 | ⁴Fairfax County (2023) Vulnerability Index | ⁵USAC (2023) | ⁶Benton.



The benefits of broadband and device access can only be enjoyed to their fullest by a digitally ready, engaged community

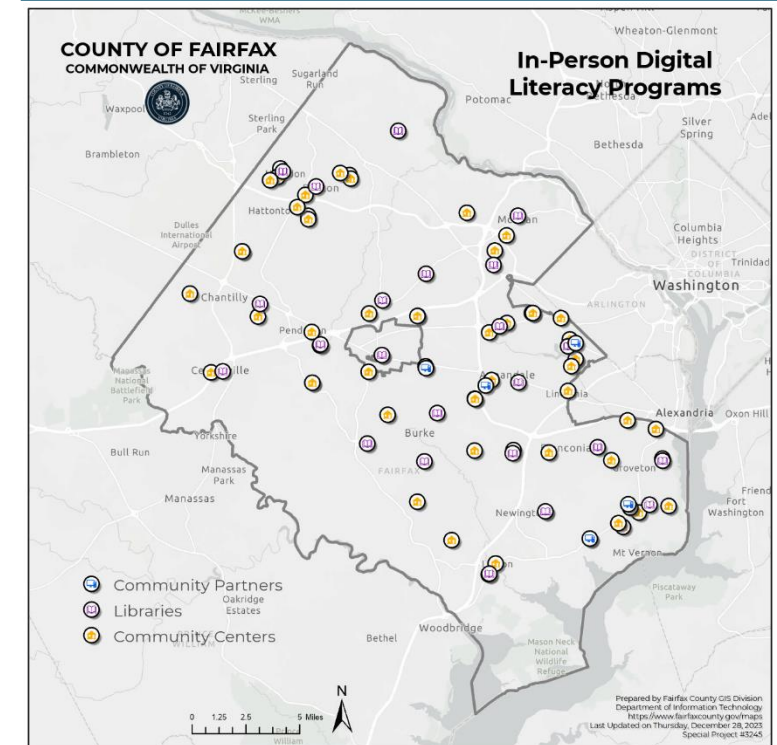
In order to deliver digital services and programming to all Fairfax County residents, champions of digital equity work must expand upon their engagement of the local community to understand the unique needs and accommodations required to reach those who are most vulnerable.

The digital literacy gap is a key factor in digital inequity, particularly for certain populations, such as English-learners and older adults. Across Fairfax County, **a myriad of programs exist to address gaps in digital literacy but there is a lack of specific metrics to track their programmatic outcomes.** Often, these programs are siloed and would benefit from integration with other digital connectivity services. Stakeholders highlighted that for some populations of residents **a lack of trust in government can make participants weary of technology, County programs, and initiatives** that require sharing documentation.

Fairfax County has a vast network of digital equity partners, including but not limited to Computer CORE, United Community, Minority Tech Foundation, Cornerstones, and the Boys and Girls Club of America. In tandem with County department work, **stakeholders identified that the digital literacy ecosystem could benefit from increased coordination across partners.** The County can play a critical role in connecting its various partners and promoting the breath of programming available to residents throughout Fairfax.

Programming and partnerships fall flat when a community does not feel included throughout the program development and deployment processes. **In almost every conversation with stakeholders, the need for inclusive, community-centered engagement was underscored.** The public offers valuable perspectives on logistical details, such as where and when trainings should be offered, as well as weighing in on what types of digital skills the programming should focus on developing. With nearly 38% of Fairfax County residents having limited English-speaking abilities¹, **county agencies and other community partners could strengthen their offerings by expanding translation services and prioritizing multi-language marketing to build awareness across Fairfax County's communities.**

Fairfax Co. Digital Literacy Programs



1. [Census Bureau \(2022\) | Language Spoken at Home](#)



The Digital Equity Action Plan will be informed by the takeaways developed in the Current State Assessment

Through a rigorous analysis and a series of stakeholder engagement conversations, the following several takeaways and opportunities for implementation to advance digital equity across the County were identified.



Accessibility

- The vast majority of Fairfax County residents reside in areas where broadband coverage is available. In order to bring connections to all Fairfax County residents, particularly those that reside in high-density neighborhoods, additional ways to make broadband accessible need to be considered.
- With a county where almost half of residents speak a language other than English, a County-wide language mandate could support in reaching diverse communities.
- ISPs can serve as an excellent partner of the County to support broadband speed testing.
- A network of public Wi-Fi is available to residents and there is an opportunity to expand the number of County locations that provide free, public Wi-Fi.



Awareness

- Several programs exist to help residents pay for broadband access and access devices. Some communities lack the knowledge of such programs and, to increase awareness, the County should conduct thoughtful engagement in the most vulnerable communities to understand how to promote existing initiatives.
- While the County and community partners offer a wide breadth of digital literacy programming for different communities, some populations have limited awareness of the opportunities available to them. Prioritizing language access and translation services in the marketing and deployment of digital literacy programming can help reach these communities.
- There are different lenses through which the County may think about digital literacy to support diverse populations of residents, such as parents and jobs seekers.
- Some Fairfax County residents presently lack the knowledge of what are adequate download speeds.
- Many agencies are providing information about resources, such as devices distribution programs, but inclusive engagement is needed to share information with underrepresented populations.



The Digital Equity Action Plan will be informed by the takeaways developed in the Current State Assessment

The following several takeaways and opportunities for implementation to advance digital equity across the County.



Affordability

- Many Fairfax Communities without broadband subscriptions have other compounding vulnerabilities that may impact their ability to afford connections. These challenges also may affect their awareness and adoption of broadband-related services.
- Fairfax has seen impressive ACP enrollment rates throughout the County and can learn from its engagement practices and partnerships that supported enrollment.
- Funding for broadband subsidy programs is an area that Fairfax County will want to examine due to the fact that many households are dependent on the support for connections.
- A distrust for sharing personal information with the government and language barriers for some residents are enrollment barriers to address.
- Populations that do not qualify for federal subsidy programs would benefit from increased awareness of other affordable broadband programs offered by ISPs.



Adoption

- Some residents are unable to participate in the current digital literacy programming due to transportation and time constraints. Flexible program options can open doors and make digital literacy training more inclusive to all Fairfax County community members.
- To ensure equitable digital literacy opportunities, agencies can leverage the Inclusive Community Engagement Framework to ensure that programs are developed in a process of co-creation with the communities they intend to support.



Advancement

- Presently, the County does not have a standardized metric to measure baseline digital literacy competencies within the community. By establishing consistent metrics and measurements of baseline digital literacy competencies, across programs and departments, program administrators could better understand Fairfax County's current levels of mastery and educational need.
- Additional structure, shared goals, and metrics can support the Digital Equity Coordination Team in implementing Countywide initiatives.
- Strengthening data collection can further enhance the county's ability to create a legislative agenda for digital equity.



To address the needs identified in the Current State Assessment, Fairfax County will need to develop a plan built on partnerships

Throughout the Current State Assessment, stakeholders emphasized the importance of strong partnerships to design and implement digital equity solutions to benefit the most vulnerable communities. The Digital Equity Action Plan will consider five key elements when building these partnerships.



Address broadband coverage throughout the County to fully accommodate infrastructure needs

Fairfax County can leverage data on high density areas and data tools, such as the Vulnerable Index and Communities of Opportunity Index to create a targeted approach to gather more information about unserved and underserved location due to wiring.



Recognize that communities utilize an array of modes and devices to access the internet

Fairfax County can consider internet availability where the community gathers, resources and information that are mobile-friendly, and culturally-appropriate support services.



Leverage partnerships to create more spaces for public wi-fi, increase awareness of affordability plans, and expand digital literacy programming

There are many departments supporting digital equity initiatives. Additional collaboration and coordination can support and expand the existing work to reach all residents.



Showcase actions and leading practices to increase implementation of Inclusive Community Framework

Additional guidance and tools can create a more actionable, inclusive framework and encourage agencies to meaningfully engage with all residents.



Utilize the Digital Equity Coordination Team to advance and sustain the digital equity work

The Digital Equity Coordination Team could serve to oversee, implement, and sustain Countywide digital equity initiatives.



Understanding Fairfax County



Fairfax has over 98% broadband coverage, but nearly 2% remain without access – these residents face compounding barriers

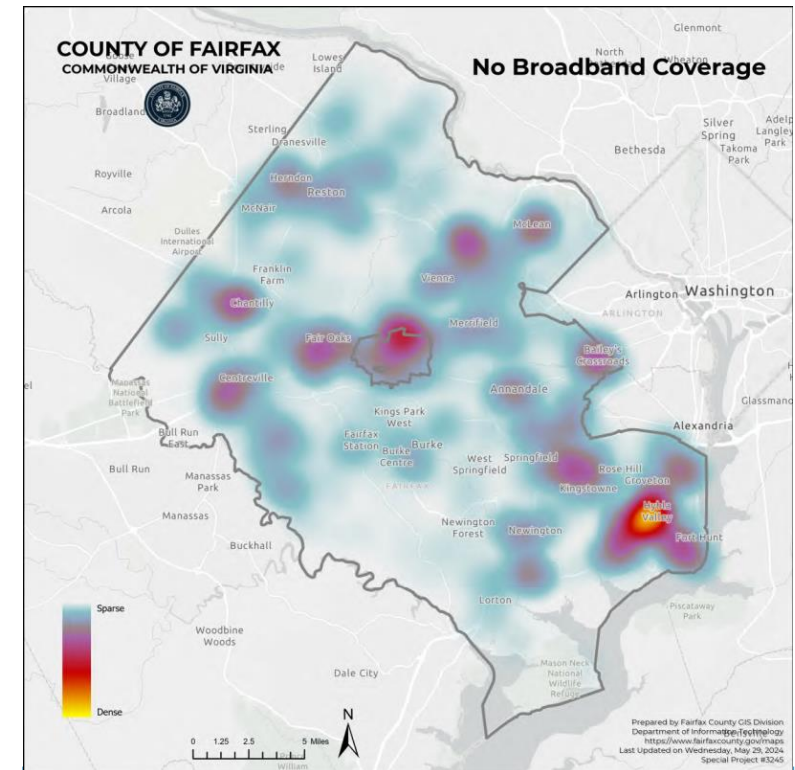
The County's commitment to infrastructure is demonstrated in their high rate of coverage, but those without access face additional barriers that require more resources to address.

Fairfax County defines digital equity as the ability to access, understand and use digital tools is essential for many tasks in modern life, including applying for jobs, paying bills, enjoying recreational activities, completing homework, staying informed and connecting with government/community services.

Fairfax County has already made tremendous progress in meeting the needs of residents, especially with respect to broadband infrastructure; but for those most vulnerable, significant barriers remain and concerted efforts at addressing them must examine the entire ecosystem. Digital equity is both a goal and tool that the county will integrate in its work and every department has committed to creating a goal in this space.

The Fairfax County's Vulnerability Index is a useful tool to further focus digital equity work. The [Vulnerability Index](#) is comprised of scores from the following indicators from the American Community Survey data: low-income occupations, low English-speaking ability, low educational attainment, median household income, households without a vehicle, population without health insurance, homeownership, and severely cost-burdened renters.¹

This Current State Assessment focuses its analysis on data from the index to understand what additional barriers exist for those without access to broadband and devices and where these barriers are concentrated. To effectively meet the needs of residents, Fairfax County strives to understand how these indicators comingle.



Quick Facts¹

Population: 1.2M

No Fixed Broadband: 1.5%

No Broadband or Computer: 5.1%

¹ Census Bureau (2019) Digital Equity Act Population Viewer



Countywide policies aimed at addressing inequity provide guidance and structure for this assessment

One Fairfax presents a framework and tools to guide equity policy across Fairfax County, but continuous coordination and resource alignment are needed to embed digital equity principles across all of the County's services.



The One Fairfax Policy provides a framework for County services to consider equity when making policies or delivering programs and services. One Fairfax establishes shared definitions, focus areas, processes, and organizational structure to address disparities related to employment, housing, health, and other social categories.

This policy examines how stakeholders can expand the definition of equity and apply processes to achieve the County's equity goals. In the Digital Equity action plan, these principles will be applied to prioritize equitable access, awareness, affordability, and adoption of digital services.



The Fairfax County Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap for future work as a county and as a community to create meaningful change throughout Fairfax County. The plan's focus on four key drivers - Equity, Community Outcomes, Data Integration, and Inclusive Community Engagement - are integrated throughout elements of this assessment. Similar to the Countywide Strategic Plan,

this Current State Assessment seeks to understand where vulnerabilities exist within the County and the interventions to address them. This analysis will provide a foundation for the takeaways that inform the action plan and develop a path to continue achieving Fairfax's digital equity goals.

As a part of the Inclusive Community Engagement Framework, Fairfax County has developed a set of principles that must be integrated in planning for more desirable outcomes in the county. The goal of this framework is to promote engagement that is **inclusive, equitable, and authentic**.

- **Inclusive:** Invite and welcome people in our community that are often invisible, especially residents who have been historically excluded, such as communities of color and low-income communities.
- **Equitable:** Place specific emphasis on those who will be most adversely impacted by the project and those who are most often marginalized in these conversations.
- **Authentic:** Engage in a way that is genuine and grounded in the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

This Current State Assessment seeks to understand how departments can better integrate these principles into their work and leverage other entities to achieve true community engagement.

Entities in the Fairfax Digital Equity Space

ISPs and Associations	Minority Technology Foundation
Northern Virginia Community College	ServiceSource
George Mason University	Britepaths
Computer CORE	Western Fairfax Christian Ministries
Cornerstones	Facets
Second Story	Boys and Girls Club of America
United Community	Chambers of Commerce



Three primary sources provide the context for the Current State Assessment

The Current State Assessment is rooted in a deep understanding of the digital equity landscape in Fairfax County. Robust data and documentation review, varied stakeholder engagement, and leading practices research constitute the core inputs to Fairfax's assessment.



Over 40 documents, datasets, and maps were reviewed to capture the most accurate snapshot of broadband in the county. This review included past digital equity reports, publicly available connectivity and population data, and the County's unique metrics and maps that have been developed in tandem with One Fairfax.

The **Chief Equity Officer, Digital Equity Coordination Team, and County GIS Experts** offered input on what data should play a leading role in the Assessment.

The insights gathered from **conversations with 56 stakeholders and community organizations** served as the basis for the core structure of the Fairfax County Digital Equity Current State Assessment and **represented a wide swath of the organizations serving Fairfax residents in achieving digital equity.**

The selection and engagement of stakeholders is discussed at length in the **Digital Equity Stakeholder Engagement Plan.**

Using four digital equity success indicators, **four peer localities were identified as thought leaders and innovative practitioners of broadband programming.** Their contributions are highlighted throughout the Current State Assessment and will inform Fairfax County's Digital Equity Action Plan. The complete report can be accessed in the Appendix.

Peers were selected due to their **similarity relative to Fairfax County** and the **applicability of their programming** to current and future County initiatives.

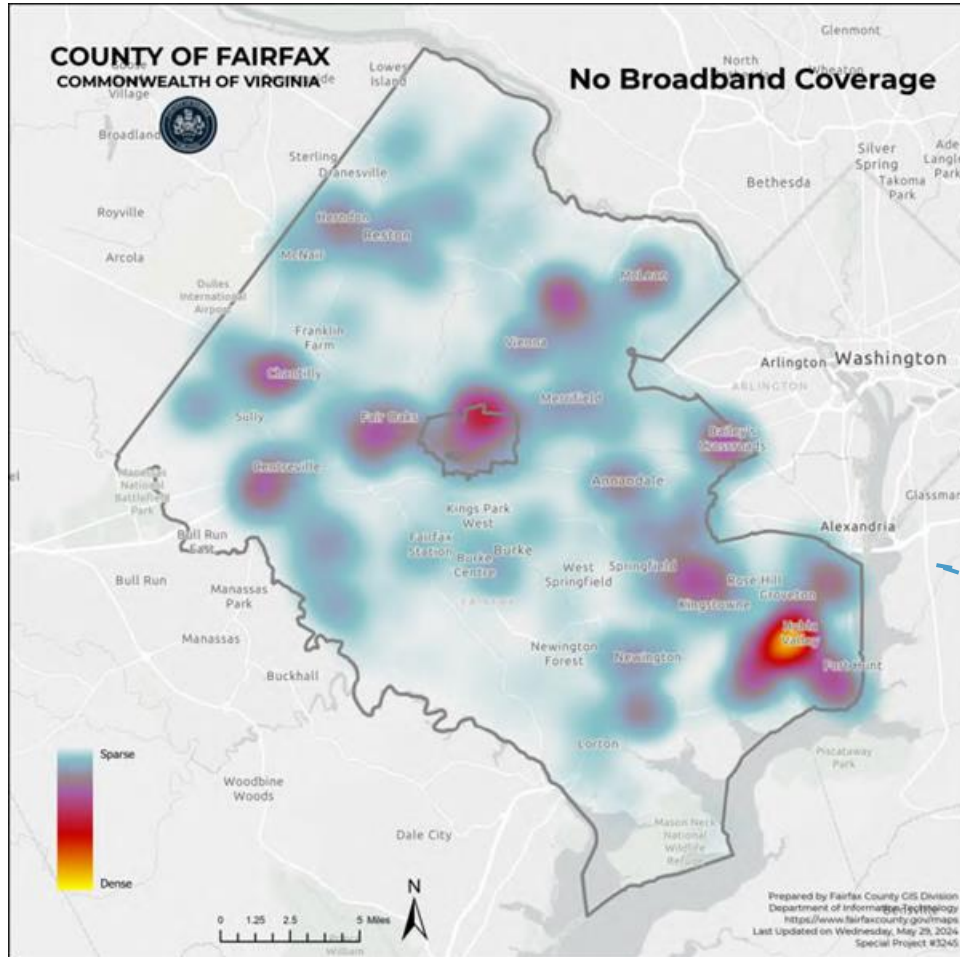


Broadband Infrastructure and Access



While 98% of households have broadband available, 5 zip codes comprise of more than half of the areas without connection

With 24.9k units without broadband in Fairfax County, five zip codes comprise of 54% of units without connection. These units are concentrated in high-density residential areas within the County.



The address with the largest number of units without broadband is 7410 Spring Village Dr, a retirement village community.

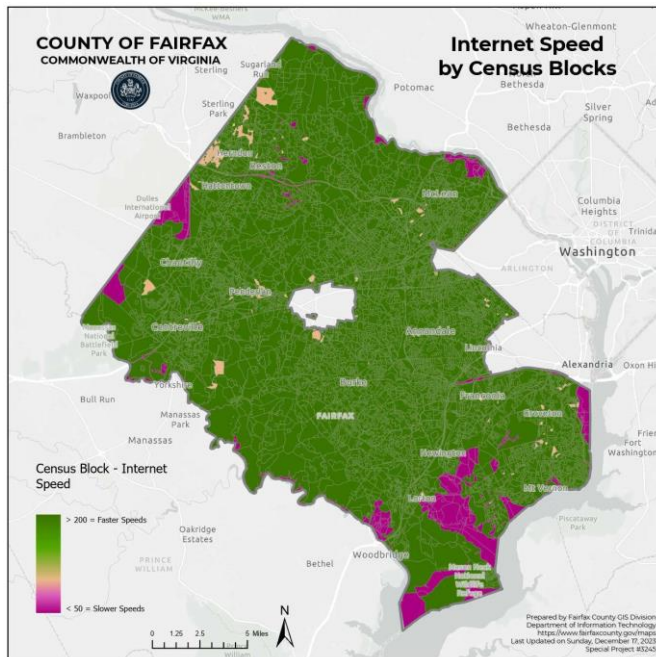
City	Zip Code	Number of units without Broadband
Alexandria	22306	4309
Falls Church	22041	4047
Herndon	20170	2139
Annandale	22003	2037
Lorton	22079	1074
Total units in Fairfax without broadband		24,998

The map show areas with no available broadband coverage overlayed residential density. While lack of broadband availability varies across low, medium, and high-density areas. Based on the map and table above, many of the population without broadband are in high-density areas.



Accurate speed tests are required in order to support successful challenge processes and understand Fairfax's connections

Beyond physical access to broadband connections, download and upload speeds govern a connection's usability. There are a variety of ways in which the County can engage residents to better understand their current levels of broadband access and internet connection speeds.



The map demonstrates that there are **slower internet speeds across the southeastern and northwestern regions of Fairfax County**. Slow download speeds are indicated in pink and faster speeds are represented in green.

BEAD Challenge Process Speed Testing

All speed tests to be considered during the BEAD Challenge Process must adhere to the following¹:

- The median result of three speed tests, taken on separate days, is used to identify service levels
- Speed tests must not be older than 60 days from the start of the challenge period
- Speed tests may be conducted by subscribers, but speed test challenges must be gathered and submitted by an eligible challenger (units of local government, nonprofit organizations, or an ISP)

Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) Applications

VATI prepares communities to build, utilize, and capitalize telecommunications infrastructure to extend broadband service to currently unserved areas.² In late 2023, Fairfax partnered with local ISPs to secure speed data to identify locations that meet the 2024 VATI application requirements.

County Considerations Speed Testing

Consolidated Speed Testing Platform

Some localities have created online platforms that support speed testing that offer joint access to a speed testing platform and a brief survey to capture supplementary information that will strengthen and make defensible the challenge.

Identifying Key Partners to Support Speed Testing

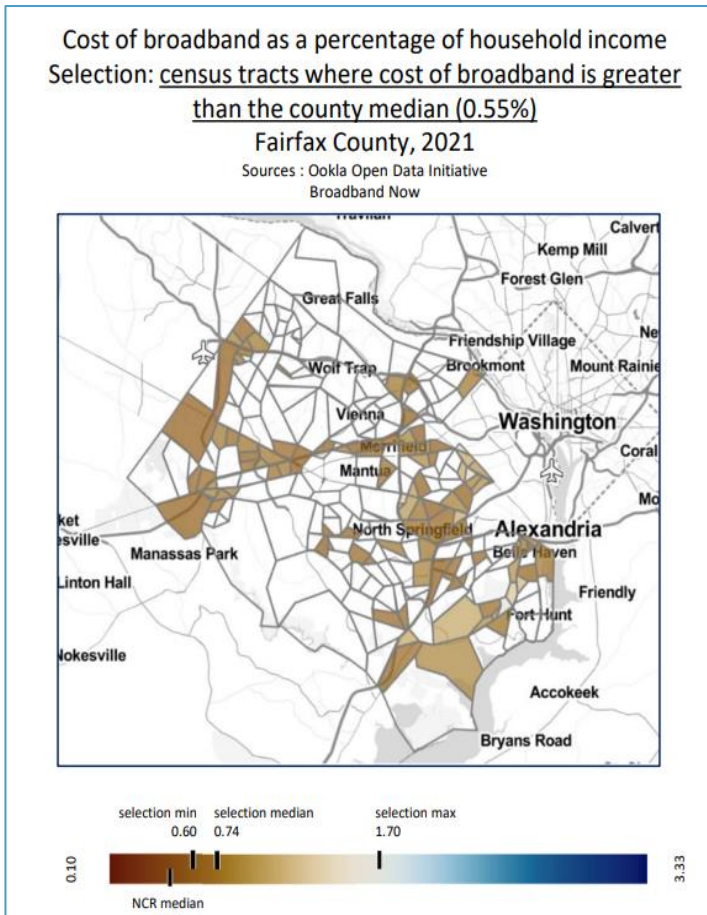
Nonprofits offer an excellent avenue for partnership to reach populations that might not have adequate broadband speeds. Organizations that have regular touchpoints with residents can encourage individuals to complete speed tests and expand the public understanding of the ways in which download speeds affect their digital experience.

¹. NTIA (2023) [Understanding the Speed Test Requirements in the Model Challenge Process](#) | ². Virginia DHCD (2023) [VATI](#)



Understanding the locations of cost burdened households can help focus outreach

Multiple internet service providers (ISPs) offer low-cost broadband affordability plans. The County can leverage income data to inform future enrollment clinics and continue the upward trend in Countywide connectivity.



There is significant **overlap between census tracts that experience the cost of broadband as a larger financial burden and those that lack broadband connection and struggle with download speeds.**

All ISPs offer plans with download speed of at least 100mbps, which is the industry benchmarking standard.

Total Number of Fairfax County ACP Households ¹	
26,755 households enrolled ¹ 26% of eligible households ²	
Largest ISPs in the County Offering ACP Affordability Plans	
Cox Communications*	Xfinity*
Verizon*	AT&T
T-Mobile	Comcast*

? How has Fairfax County increased its ACP enrollment?

In the past several months, Fairfax County has seen an unprecedented rise in ACP enrollment. This growth can, in part, be attributed to a strong partnership with Education Superhighway, briefings with staff to educate them on ACP promotion, targeted awareness-building in dedicated area and the launch of the first official Digital Inclusion Week. Collectively, this approach has elevated the benefits of ACP and has driven enrollment.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Multiple stakeholders highlighted that the ACP enrollment process is burdensome to eligible families who struggle with the completion of administrative forms. Others shared that a lack of awareness about the ACP program is a barrier for both the public and nonprofit partners looking to assist in enrollment. **Additionally, there may be some households that do not qualify for ACP but still cannot afford broadband service.**

1. Universal Service Administrative Company (2023) ACP Enrollment Data | 2. Benton Institute ACP Enrollment Performance Tool

* Denotes ISPs that also offer affordability programs that are not exclusively affiliated with the ACP



Sustainability challenges may limit the longevity of device lending programs

Compounding vulnerabilities leave some Fairfax County residents without a personal broadband-connected device. While device lending programs can fill the gaps in the short-term, these programs require regular investment, device fleet maintenance, and tracking.

Fairfax County Device Lending Programs

Loan Program	Type of Device	Full Device Fleet Quantity	Recipients	Length of Loan
Fairfax County Public Library's Connect Kits	Chromebook and Hotspot	75 laptops 75 hotspots	Adults (18+)	2 weeks
Fairfax County Public School's FCPSOn Program	Chromebook and MiFi Hotspot	180K laptops 180K hotspots	Students (Grades 3-12 for take-home devices)	1 academic year

A number of County Agencies and nonprofit partners, including the Department of Family Services, Computer CORE, and United Community, also provide refurbished devices to residents without a specified loan period.



Stakeholder Perspectives

The Fairfax County Public Library System identified that sustained funding of Connect Kit fleet maintenance would be among the most helpful investments the County could make in digital equity. Annually, ~20% of the fleet requires maintenance or replacement.



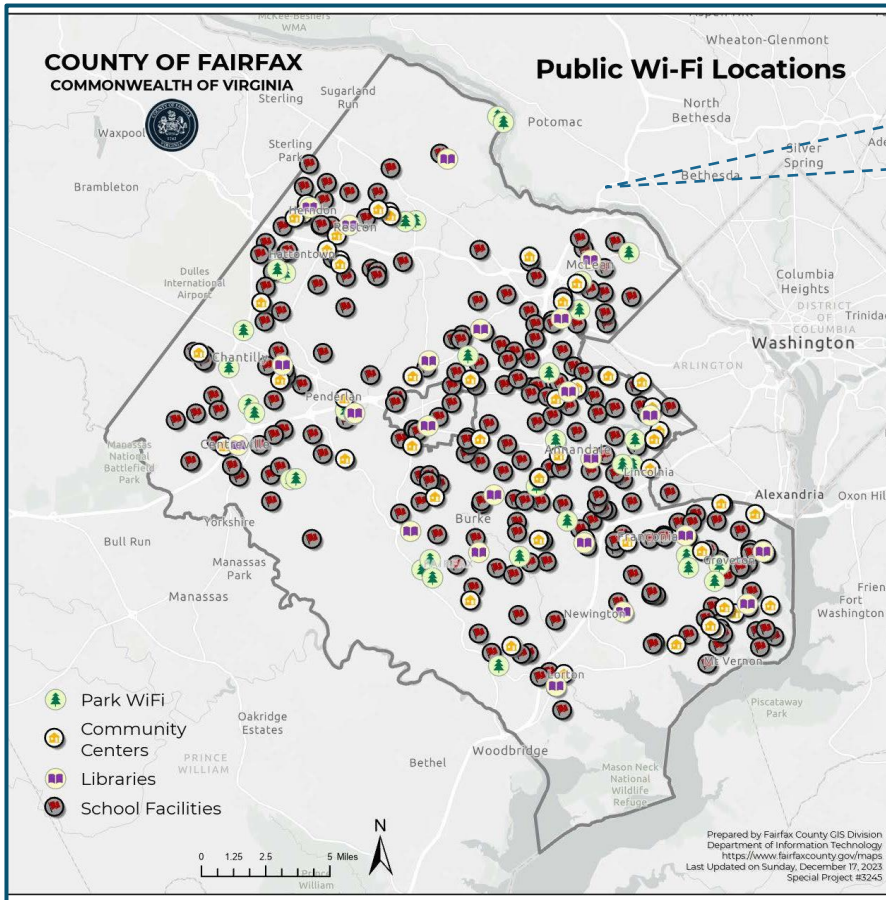
What is an alternative to device lending programs?

Device gifting programs can be considered as an alternative to device lending programs. These initiatives decrease the administrative headache, for both the consumer and the County, of lending a device and instead grants ownership and agency into the hands of the resident. In addition to device gifting programs, some programs leverage discount programs. For example, the ACP offers eligible households a \$100 incentive to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from a participating ISP.



The County currently offers many locations in which free public Wi-Fi is available; however, access still may be a concern for some

The County boasts many building and land assets that are equipped with a free, public wi-fi network to support connectivity, even if residents do not have access at home. There is an opportunity to expand these connections to reach the most vulnerable Fairfax constituents.



This map demonstrates that free, public Wi-Fi is relatively widespread throughout the county. Currently, gaps in publicly available Wi-Fi exist in several areas across the county, notably northern and southwestern regions. These geographic constraints offer opportunities for continued investment and wi-fi expansion to reach more residents.

County Wi-Fi Partners



Barriers to Wi-Fi

There are several other barriers that keep residents from accessing public Wi-Fi.

- **Transportation** – Some residents lack transportation options to reach the community centers and locations that offer public connections.
- **Available Hours** – Many of the public Wi-Fi connections are shut off after facility hours close. For residents with nontraditional work schedules, this limits the accessibility of the network.

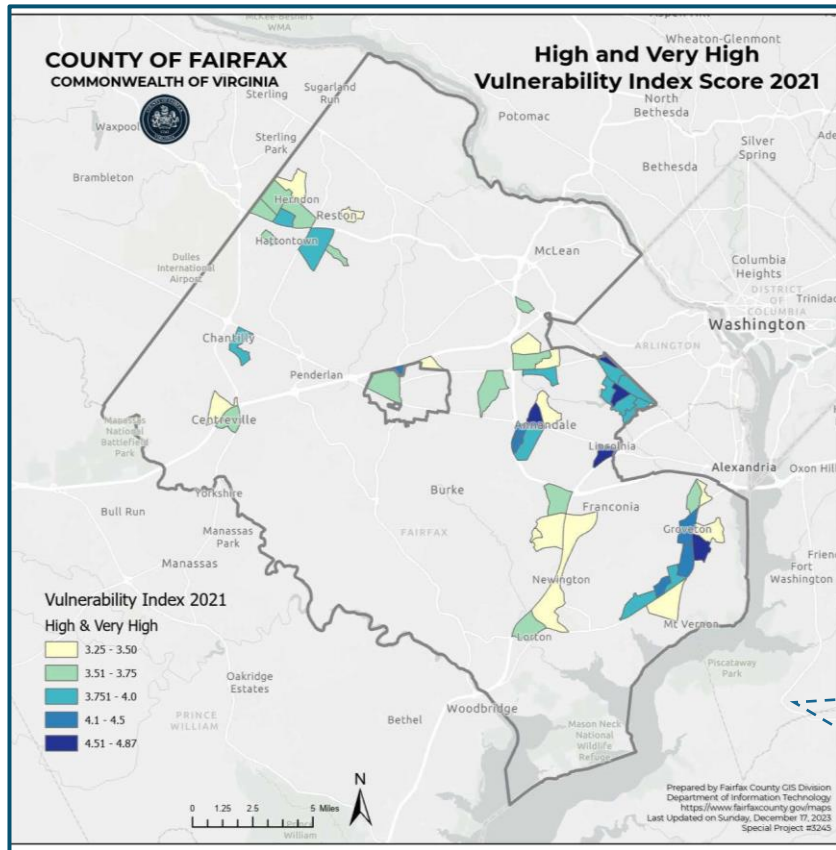


Stakeholder Perspectives

Multiple stakeholder groups issued a suggestion to expand the County's public Wi-Fi system across all Fairfax County Parks. This would expand the number of locations offering connections and increase the accessibility to many County residents due to their locations.

The Fairfax County Vulnerability Index reveals the compounding vulnerabilities within communities with low broadband availability

Fairfax's Vulnerability Index rates census blocks based on eight indicators related to socio-economic and demographic facts to determine areas with the most need. Utilizing broadband availability data, these five neighborhoods were rated as having high or very high amounts of need.



Census Tracts	Percentage of Broadband subscriptions ¹	Vulnerability Rating ²	Vulnerability Drivers
Census Tract 4316.01	33.4%	High	
Census Tract 4514	62.3%	Very High	
Census Tract 4515.02	76%	Very High	
Census Tract 4714.02	78.3%	High	
Census Tract 4516.01	79.1%	Very High	

Coloring Key	Indicator Key
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rated 4 Rated 5 (Most Vulnerable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low educational attainment Population without health insurance Low English-speaking ability Population that are not homeowners Household income Severely cost-burdened renter households Households without a vehicle

Census tracts with highest Vulnerability Index scores underscore intersecting challenges that some Fairfax residents face surrounding employment, transportation, education, etc.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Stakeholders representing NOVA Community college shared how lack of transportation can compound issues of limited access in the home. If students with limited online access cannot travel to public wi-fi areas, they are left with limited options to connect to internet and digital services.

1. US Census (2022) Types of Computer and Internet Subscriptions. | 2 Fairfax County Vulnerability Index



The County's broadband infrastructure is widespread; a focused approach is required to bridge the gap for those who lack access

For the Fairfax County residents who lack broadband and device access and those who require affordable support programs, there are additional barriers that require a holistic community-focused approach to address the need for flexibility in the County's digital offerings.



Accessibility

- Most Fairfax County residents have broadband service. To bring connections to all residents, particularly those that reside in high-density neighborhoods and/or speak English as a second language, programs and strategic actions must be developed that meet their specific needs, including building updates or increasing free public Wi-Fi.



Awareness

- Programs exist throughout Fairfax County to help residents pay for broadband internet and devices. Some communities lack the knowledge of such programs and, to increase awareness, the County should conduct thoughtful engagement in the most vulnerable communities to understand how to promote existing initiatives and confirm the programs meet residents' needs.
- Some residents presently lack the knowledge of what are adequate download speeds.



Affordability

- Fairfax has impressive ACP enrollment rates throughout the County and can use lessons from its engagement practices and partnerships for other digital offerings.
- Funding for broadband subsidy programs is an area that Fairfax County will want to examine due to the fact that many households are dependent on the support for connections.
- A distrust for sharing personal information with the government and language barriers for some residents are enrollment barriers to address.
- Populations that do not qualify for federal subsidy programs would benefit from increased awareness of other affordable broadband programs offered by ISPs.



Digital Literacy and Skills



Digital literacy is a core facet of digital equity and an explicit priority for Fairfax County

The benefits of broadband and device access can only be harnessed by a digitally literate community. Fairfax County recognizes this fact and empowers its residents to be responsible digital citizens and consumers of online information.



How does Fairfax County define 'Digital Literacy'?

Fairfax County defines digital literacy as the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. To Fairfax County residents, this can look like the use of diverse technologies appropriately and effectively to retrieve information, communicate, and collaborate with peers, colleagues, family, and the broader County community.

Digital Literacy Advances One Fairfax

Digital literacy is intimately tied to One Fairfax's policy. Beyond serving as a cornerstone component of **Focus Area 15. Digital access and literacy for all**, a digitally literate Fairfax community would advance:

- Workforce development
- Cybersecurity and privacy
- Civic engagement
- Transportation usage
- Telehealth
- Community wellbeing

Digital literacy also goes hand-in-hand with many of the **processes** outlined in the One Fairfax policy for government employees to adhere to. Digital skills will improve their ability to engage the community, attend equity trainings, and employ equity tools.

Digital Literacy Metrics in Fairfax County

Fairfax County offers residents a host of digital literacy offerings. However, **stakeholder engagement revealed that there is no universal way that the County and its partners measure digital literacy competencies**. Presently, attendance is the most common metric that was tracked across digital skill-building trainings. Some entities, such as the libraries, offer a pre-test prior to basic literacy trainings, but this data is not widely shared with partners and is not applied across all programming. A standardized set of objectives and metrics would strengthen the Countywide effort to improve digital literacy.



Stakeholder Perspectives

"A lot of our families don't know what they don't know. They need the opportunity for digital literacy because a lot of their kids are digital natives and they're leaving their families behind."

– Fairfax County Public Schools Representative



Fairfax County departments and agencies currently offer eight digital literacy programs to a variety of audiences

The programmatic offerings designed to bridge the digital divide across the County range from basic device setup support for aging adults to advanced technology and virtual reality training for first responders.

Digital Literacy Offerings in Fairfax County

Program	Description	Target Population
Community Technology Program	The Department of Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) designed the Community Technology Program to enhance the digital literacy among children and adults in underserved communities throughout Fairfax County. The After-School Program offers a structured environment for technology education and academic support for children and teens. Staff also host workshops and provide specialized instruction for adults during the day.	Children and Adults in Underserved Communities
Clubhouse Network	The Clubhouse Network is a global initiative which provides a creative and fun out-of-school learning environment for children and teens. NCS participants are given the tools and skills to explore their own creative ideas and designs, develop problem-solving skills and enhance their confidence in using a variety of technologies.	Children and Teens
Technology Education for Older Adults	NCS offers a wide variety of technology training courses at each of its Senior Centers covering topics such as: basic computer skills, the use of mobile devices, social media, and photography.	Aging Adults
Virtual Reality Empathy Training	The Department of Family Services (DFS), in partnership with NOVA Health, deliver an immersive experience, leveraging virtual reality immersion, to teach first responders to empathize with those who suffer from dementia and loss.	Medical Staff and First Responders
Technology Programs and Clinics	The Fairfax Public Library System offers a host of regular technology training opportunities available to the public. Topics range from eBook site navigation and 3D printing guidance to general tech help.	All Fairfax County Residents
Digital Citizenship Week	Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) host an annual Digital Citizenship Week event where students and parents are encouraged to responsibly participate in the digital environment. Educational materials are circulated regarding cybersecurity, digital footprints, and online wellbeing.	Fairfax County Students and Families
Online Digital Skills Resources	The Fairfax Public Library System offers online resources to help residents acquire basic digital skills. Resources include access to LearningExpress Library, LinkedIn Learning, and Universal Class.	All Fairfax County Residents
Access Fairfax	Organized by NCS, Access Fairfax is a network of devices and digital resources for residents, who otherwise would not have access to current technology. Access Fairfax locations enable participants to access the internet to connect to a variety of Fairfax County e-Services, prepare resumes and search for jobs.	All Fairfax County Residents



The County also leverages the work of its community partners to expand access to digital literacy training

Nonprofits and other County partners have a longstanding relationship with the Fairfax community and offer regular digital literacy programming available to a number of different resident groups.

Digital Literacy Offerings in Fairfax County

Program	Description	Target Population
Distance Learning Classes	Computer CORE offers free, online, basic computer skills classes to adults 18 and over in Fairfax County. In these courses, learners are taught how to navigate a computer and gain skills in the software programs that employers seek. Skills taught range from basic competencies, such as navigating a keyboard and mouse, to more advanced skills like coding in Python.	All Adult Fairfax County Residents*
Workforce Development Training Programs	Through partnerships with local community, academia and technology companies, Minority Tech Foundation (MTF) bridges the gap for minorities who would not otherwise have access to technology training and media arts education. MTF educates learners on several digital literacy competencies throughout the Workforce Development Training Programs as well as offers basic computer skills trainings, as well as cybersecurity and virtual reality coursework.	Minority Fairfax County Residents
Assistive Technology Support	ServiceSource supports Fairfax County residents that live with disabilities by assessing, customizing, and training individuals on how to utilize assistive technology to meet their unique needs. Some assistive technology support trains residents and their care teams with tools such as word dictation, screen readers, adaptive mice, and keyboards.	Fairfax County Residents Living With Disabilities
Pathways to Sustainable Employment Program	Cornerstones offers a Pathways to Sustainable Employment program that is designed to fill gaps in workforce development and job training programs that do not serve the needs of job seekers in the Herndon/Reston area whose education and skill levels put them at a disadvantage in the workplace. A component of the course offers insight into how “soft skills” complement and interact with “hard skills,” such as computer literacy, ESL, GED, vocational training, certifications, or additional college education.	Herndon / Reston Area Residents
MyFuture Online Learning Activities – Digital Literacy Essentials	The Boys and Girls Club’s Digital Literacy Essentials offers engaging project experiences for youth ages 8-15 to explore digital safety, digital privacy, digital presence, online communication and retro gaming. Delivered through MyFuture, Digital Literacy Essentials activities allow youth to upload projects, build a digital portfolio, and earn stars and badges.	Fairfax County Youth
Basic Digital Literacy Skill-Building	In both the Sacramento Neighborhood Center and the Creekside Community Center, United Community offers residents computer labs that are staffed with employees who can provide one-on-one basic digital literacy support.	All Fairfax County Residents

*Some Computer CORE programs have income eligibility requirements, depending on the funder



Digital literacy programming is currently delivered through the County's network of community partners and County agencies

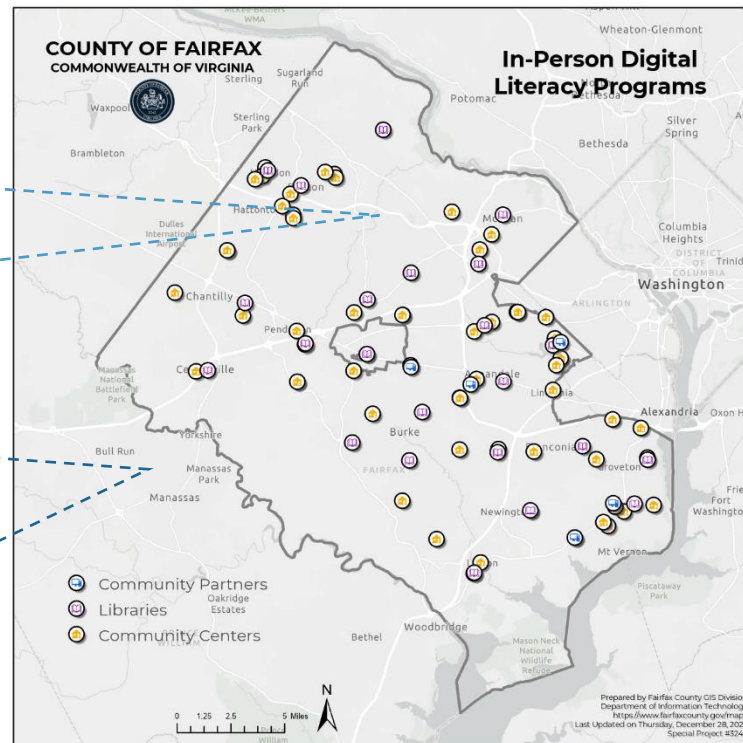
Digital literacy programs are available across the County and are accessible for different resident demographic groups, notably students in community centers and adults in senior centers. Those who do not have access face barriers to their attendance and participation.

Geographic Barriers

This map demonstrates that, while Fairfax County as a whole is a well-resourced locality when it comes to digital literacy programming, there are several neighborhoods in which access is relatively limited.

This map demonstrates all formal, in-person digital literacy programs offered in the County. **Many programs delivered by the County and its partners are not specifically directed at developing digital literacy, but technological skills are supported and developed, nonetheless.** For example, school registration clinics assist Fairfax County families in creating emails to support their students and stay connected with the school community.

Fairfax Co. Digital Literacy Programs



Accessibility Challenges

Many stakeholders highlighted compounding challenges that limit some residents' ability to use the existing digital literacy programming landscape.



Unreliable Transportation

Some residents lack reliable transportation to and from programming sites.



Inaccessible Program Hours

The hours for offered programming do not meet residents' need, specifically those during working hours.



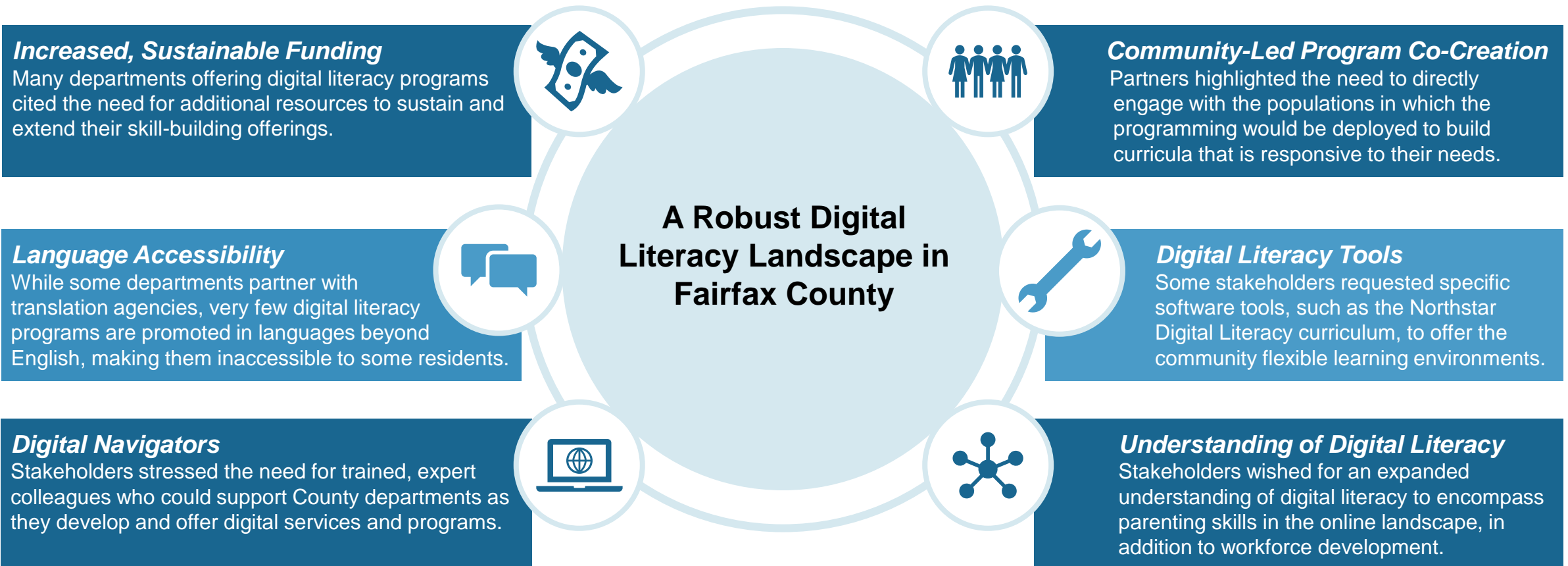
Language Challenges

Some individuals do not speak the language in which the program is offered.



Partners that deliver digital literacy programming have identified areas of need that require additional attention and support

Across stakeholder conversations, the following six themes emerged as opportunities for improvement in the delivery of digital literacy training. These themes may inform Digital Equity Action Plan recommendations and shape future programming development.





Co-creation, metric-tracking, and awareness-building can elevate the work of existing digital literacy programs

The County and its partners have a robust catalogue of digital literacy programming. By thoughtfully engaging communities and tracking programmatic outcomes, digital literacy educators can unlock the full benefits of a digitally-connected County.



Awareness

- While the County and community partners offer a wide breadth of digital literacy programming for a number of key communities, some populations have limited awareness of the opportunities available to them. Prioritizing language access and translation services in the marketing and deployment of digital literacy programming can help reach these communities.
- There are different lenses through which the County may think about digital literacy to support diverse populations of residents, such as parents and jobs seekers.



Adoption

- Some residents are unable to participate in current digital literacy programs due to transportation and time constraints. Flexible programming options can open doors and make digital literacy training more inclusive to all Fairfax County community members.
- To ensure equitable digital literacy opportunities, agencies can leverage the Inclusive Community Engagement Framework to ensure that programs are developed in a process of co-creation with the communities they intend to support.



Advancement

- Presently, the County does not have a standardized metric to measure baseline digital literacy competencies within the community. By establishing consistent metrics and measurement of baseline digital literacy competencies, across programs and departments, program administrators could better understand Fairfax's current levels of mastery and educational need.

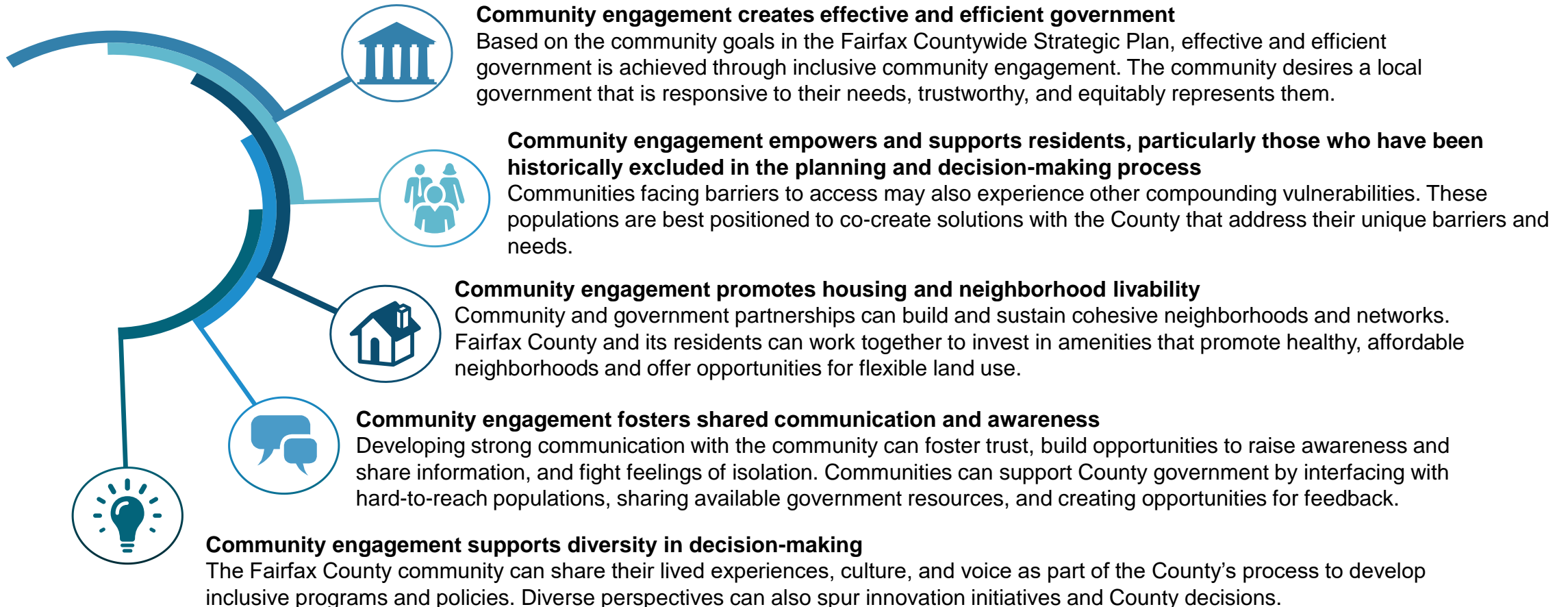


Inclusion and Representation



Centering the voices and experiences on the community is essential for providing equitable government service

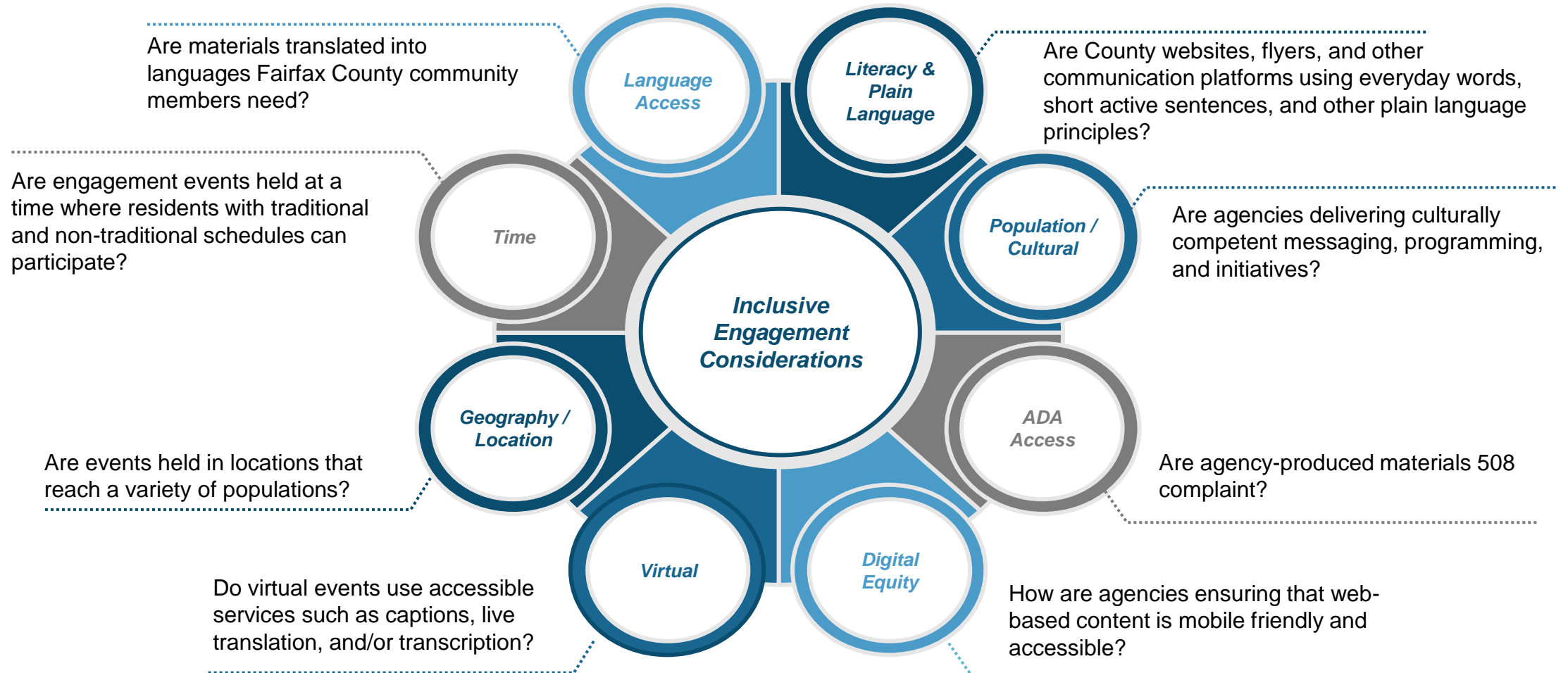
One Fairfax highlights the importance of engaging the community to ensure that equity is intentionally considered in decision-making. The County's Strategic Plan, Engage Fairfax, and Inclusive Community Engagement Framework present the following benefits for the community.





Fairfax County has an inclusive engagement framework, but agencies need additional guidance to operationalize big ideas

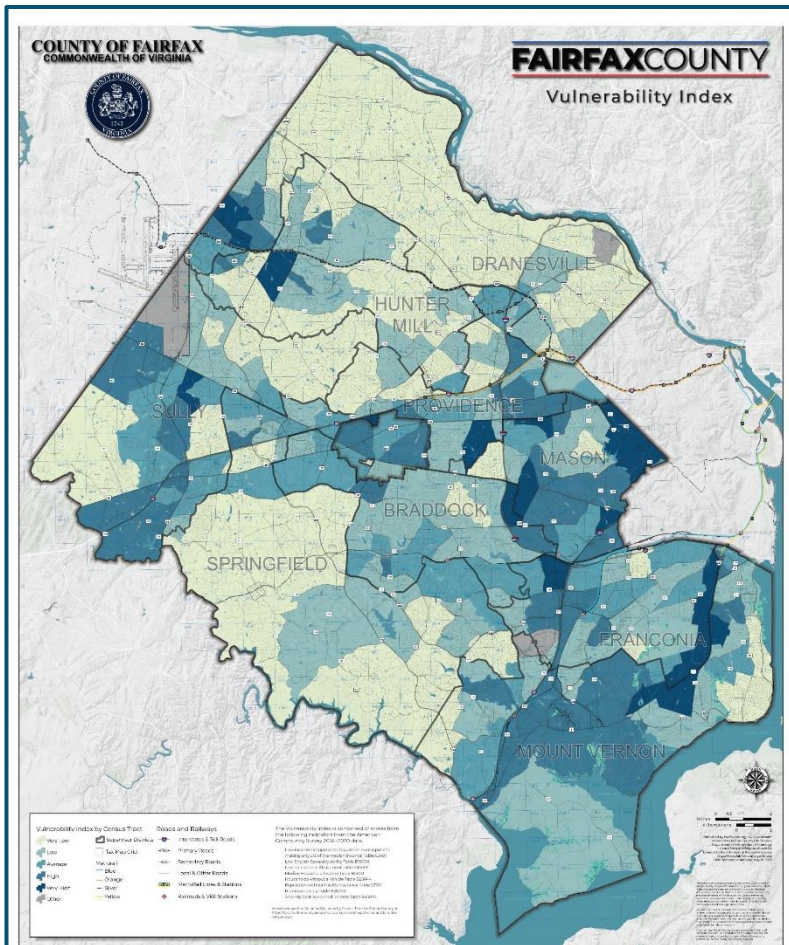
The Inclusive Engagement Framework is intended to share guidelines for how the County should engage residents. While platforms, such as Engage Fairfax are helpful tools for resident engagement who can access the internet, County agencies need more actionable guidance.





Communities with limited English proficiency are unable to fully participate in government-led engagement and services

Fairfax County has a language access policy, in which agencies are encouraged to have accessible materials and websites, agencies have discretion for how and when translations are used.



Limited English proficiency is a core component in the Vulnerability Index and often accompanies other compounding vulnerabilities

Top Languages Spoken in Fairfax¹

Spanish	Urdu
Persian (including Farsi and Dan)	Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese)
Hindi	Korean
Vietnamese	Arabic

Current Language Access Landscape

Almost 40% of Fairfax County residents speak a language other than English. Within the Fairfax County Public School system, 44% of students pre-k-12th grade speak a language at home other than English. With almost half of the school population speaking a language other than English, Fairfax County's Language Access Policy provides guidance to departments on the organizational responsibilities and procedures to facilitate language access and quality customer service to residents with Limited English proficiency.









Stakeholder Perspectives

Fairfax County has a large population of limited English language speakers. The County offers some translated material but don't provide translated job descriptions or interpreters for interviews. More could be done to support the engagement of non-English speaking communities in pursuit of equitable outcomes.



Agencies are utilizing best practices in inclusive community engagement but need additional support for full adoption

Many agencies highlighted actions they are undertaking that align to the Inclusive Community Engagement Framework. With additional guidance and tools, like Engage Fairfax, more agencies should be equipped to adopt this framework in their services and programs.

Literacy / Plain Language	Geography	Language Access	Population / Cultural		Time	Virtual	Accessibility
							
<p>Currently, there are no systems or standard processes in place to gauge the readability of website content. The Office of Public Affairs tested a free tool to quickly assess the readability of some website content for demonstration purposes.</p>	<p>Cable and Consumer Services utilizes geographic data from the Vulnerability Index to plan their community events. This ensures communities in need of support are directly engaged by the agency.</p>	<p>With almost half (44%) of Fairfax Public School students speaking a language other than English at home, Fairfax Public School have invested in-house interpreters that speak more than 24 languages.</p>	<p>Fairfax Department of Family Services has a volunteer-based helpline where Seniors can call for support with their IT needs. This line supports seniors where they are to receive digital support, including accessing emails or other IT-related issues.</p>	<p>NCS has a community impact unit specifically designed to work with the community residents, nonprofits and faith partners to support resident engagement and voice into government policies, programs, and serve on advisory boards.</p>	<p>While Fairfax County libraries are open from 8am-4:30pm, the Libraries offer wi-fi services in their parking lot from 6am-10pm, to provide additional service hours for community members that need wi-fi access.</p>	<p>North Virginia Community College (NOVA) works with professors and administrators to make class content available online in mobile-friendly formats for students that may only have access to a phone for coursework.</p>	<p>The County's website is not 508 compliant and new tools, including those that assess readability, are needed to achieve compliance that is quantifiable and tracked over time.</p>



Fairfax County has made a commitment to inclusively engaging the community, but more guidance is needed for implementation

Inclusive engagement can support awareness and adoption of government programming amongst vulnerable communities. Understanding the communities' needs and barriers will support agencies in advancing digital equity throughout the County.



Awareness

- Agencies and their partners should evaluate their projects and initiatives against the inclusive framework to ensure that they are utilizing practices to spread awareness and secure community buy-in for their programming. They can also track attendance from participants to understand if they are reaching the communities that they intend to serve.



Adoption

- Community engagement is essential for understanding barriers and needs of the community in an effort to co-create solutions. Considering the lived experiences of community members will strengthen outcomes from the engagement.
- Creating inclusive content, including mobile-friendly, translated and culturally-appropriate material can promote adoption among residents.



Advancement

- Departments are aware of the Inclusive Engagement Framework, but tools such as guidance documents and leading practices can make the framework more actionable and advance community engagement efforts.
- Departments and nonprofits can look at the characteristics or locations of the populations they are serving and understand if there are gaps their plan for inclusion.



Capacity Building



Fairfax has a vast network of digital equity partners with existing programs and services seeking to close the digital divide

Fairfax County has an existing ecosystem dedicated to closing the digital divide. Through formal and informal programs, building relationships and creating cohesiveness amongst these partners is essential to pushing the work forward.

Internet Service Providers

Internet service providers like Cox Communications and Verizon offer low-costs plans and often partner with community organizations to provide devices. In October 2023, Cox Communications partnered with Fairfax County government to organize a Digital Equity Summit with organizations and residents coming together to advance digital equity in the community.

County Residents

County residents are best positioned to inform Fairfax County of their needs and barriers. Through priorities set in the Fairfax Strategic Plan and the Inclusive Engagement Framework, community residents are being more intentionally engaged and empowered to support programs and policy implemented in the county. To be successful in implementing Digital Equity Action Plan, county residents will need to be at the forefront of decision-making.

County Department

Fairfax County departments addressing their digital needs of various populations through formal programs as well as ensuring Digital Equity principles are embedded into their work. Department staff work directly with residents to share resources and information related to affordability programs and support residents in getting connected to email or community-based organizations.

Community based Organizations

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are often the connector for government and the community residents. CBOs often have strong relationships with their local community, providing a variety of services to support residents. Organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Club of America and Computer CORE provide digital literacy and skills training. Other organizations like Facets offer community space for residents to utilize wi-fi, devices, and support communities' digital needs.

Local Businesses

Fairfax County businesses are essential partners in closing the digital divide and supporting economic mobility within Fairfax County. Business understand the digital skills needed to perform in today's workforce and are partnering with government and community-based organizations to provide resources and trainings rooted in skilling communities for the future of jobs in Fairfax County.



While still in its infancy, the Digital Equity Coordination Team has the opportunity to guide the work for the County

With clear roles and responsibilities, additional partners, and shared goals and metrics, the Digital Equity Coordination Team can be the organizational body to lead and coordinate Digital Equity in Fairfax County.

The Digital Equity Coordination Team consists of County departments implementing Digital Equity Initiatives. As of this year, the departments have created agency specific goals towards improving digital equity.



Stakeholder Perspectives

Stakeholders commented that having access to data for broadband availability in the County could aid other Agencies' engagement work. For example, understanding where there is limited broadband access could inform the number and location of in-person community events versus virtual and web-based engagement.



Digital Equity Coalition Leading Practice

In collaboration Washington State University (WSU), The Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) established the Broadband Action Teams (BATs). The BATs consisted of residents, local organizations such as the Libraries, school districts, and Tribes with the goal of providing the local perspective and support coordination for broadband expansion and digital equity supports. In 2023, the BATs were provided with funding and technical assistance through WSU to survey and develop baseline data to assess the needs and strategies from the community. The BATs would meet monthly and report out to the State on their progress.

Things to Consider

The Digital Equity Coordination Team could leverage coordination including data sharing, additional partnerships, such as public/private partnerships, and create sustainable initiatives.

To strengthen the structure and work of the Digital Equity Coordination Committee, Fairfax County should consider the following adjustments.



Creating Alignment

Utilizing shared goals and metrics to measure success for initiatives and programs



Inclusive Representation

Leveraging existing spaces for community members, ISP, and other external partners to provide input



Defined Roles and Responsibilities

Creating clear roles and establishing a department lead for the Coordination Team to increase buy-in and coordination for initiatives



Digital Ambassadors can support the Digital Equity Coordination Team in building capacity to connect with communities

Building on the lessons learned from other agencies' community ambassador programs, a program focused on digital ambassadors has the potential to provide additional capacity for County efforts and assist with connecting and implementing initiatives.



The Fairfax County Department of Health operates a Community Ambassador program with individuals from all walks of life that are identified as leaders within their respective communities. These Community ambassadors serve as connectors through sharing Department of Health information with the community and sharing cultural and other insights with the Agency.



Fairfax County Public Schools operate a student ambassador program for students to support new students and their families in becoming familiar with their new school and environment. This peer-led program is intended create connections, reduce stress, and support the new students in learning about critical school information.



Fairfax County Department of Transportation² operates a Bicycle and Pedestrian Ambassador program that supports the Fairfax Community in making the streets safer for biking and pedestrian activities. The Ambassadors are provided trainings and resources to share educational information, provide trainings at local events, and model good bicycle behavior.



Stakeholder Perspectives

Many stakeholders noted the benefits of utilizing community ambassadors with lived experience to combat communities' distrust of government and government services. Community ambassadors can also support with communicating purpose and goals of programs in hard-to-reach communities.



Digital Navigator Leading Practice¹

The Denver Public Library serves more than 4 million visitors a year across 27 locations. Through the Digital Inclusion Department, the library operates a digital navigator program that supports device distribution, digital literacy training and their Bookmobiles, a mobile book and computer lab for communities.

In 2022, the program supported more than 340 customers in signing up for ACP and distributed more than 450 Chromebooks.

1. [Denver Public Library \(2023\) Celebrating Digital Navigators](#) | 2. [Department of Transportation \(2023\) Bike and Pedestrian Ambassador](#)



Strong partnerships are needed to create a system to support Digital Equity

The Digital Equity Coordination Team is well positioned to advance digital equity initiatives in Fairfax County. Adding additional members, creating shared metrics and goals, and leveraging Digital Ambassadors can improve awareness and adoption of government resources.



Awareness

- County Agencies provide essential services to communities, often sharing resources to support their target populations. Information sharing among government Agencies on resources such as other government program, ACP sign-up information and other resources to reduce the digital divide.



Adoption

- The use of digital ambassadors with lived experience can serve as connectors to community and supporters of Digital Equity Coordination team initiatives. The use of two-way communication, sharing information from the Digital Equity Coordination Team and sharing the experiences of the community can build capacity and support for success implementation of initiatives.



Advancement

- By working together, the Digital Equity ecosystem can create long-term initiatives that are supported by a number of partners and rooted in the exact needs of the community.

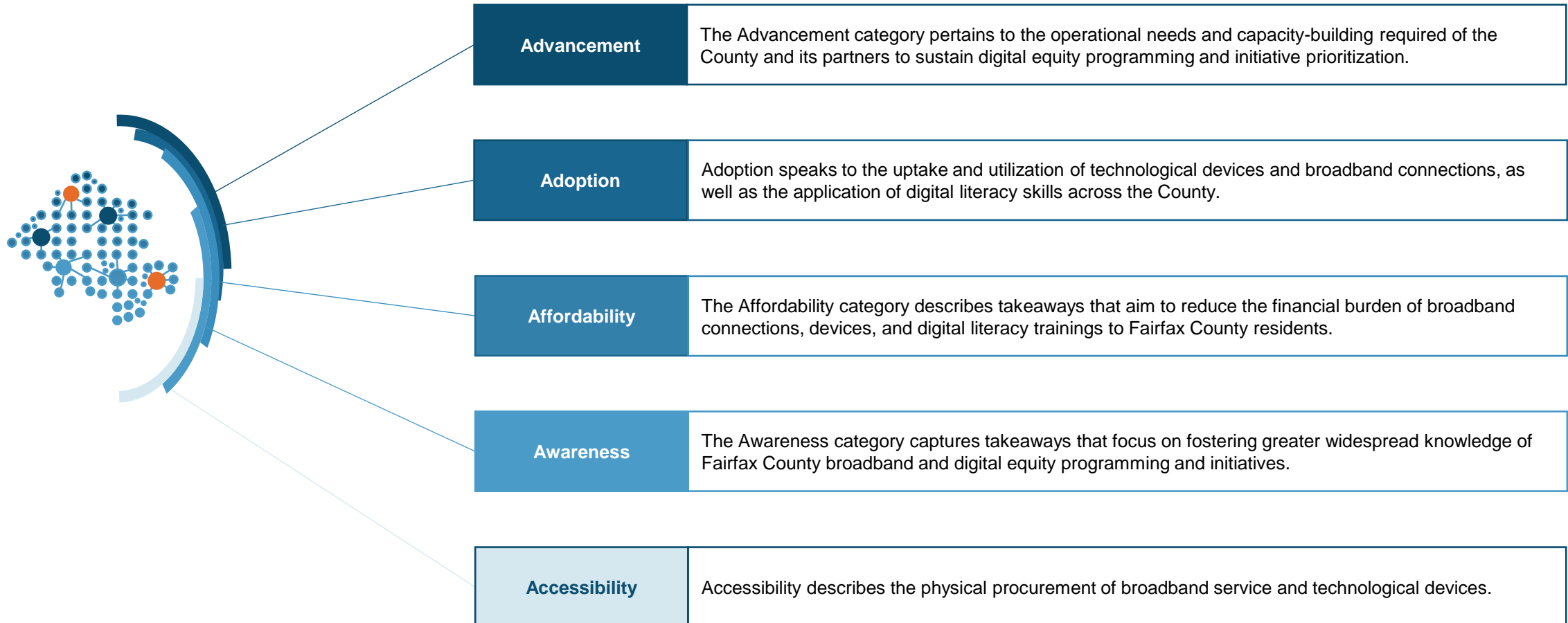


Looking Forward



The Current State Assessment takeaways impact Fairfax's approach to achieving their ideal future state

The County has identified five categories which are representative of a strong digital equity ecosystem. Conclusions, takeaways, and considerations that are formulated in the Current State Assessment will be sorted to enhance these five domains.





The Digital Equity Action Plan will be informed by the takeaways developed in the Current State Assessment

Through a rigorous analysis and a series of stakeholder engagement conversations, the following several takeaways and opportunities for implementation to advance digital equity across the County were identified.



Accessibility

- The vast majority of Fairfax County residents reside in areas where broadband coverage is available. In order to bring connections to all Fairfax County residents, particularly those that reside in high-density neighborhoods, additional ways to make broadband accessible need to be considered.
- With a county where almost half of residents speak a language other than English, a County-wide language mandate could support in reaching diverse communities.
- ISPs can serve as an excellent partner of the County to support broadband speed testing.
- A network of public Wi-Fi is available to residents and there is an opportunity to expand the number of County locations that provide free, public Wi-Fi.



Awareness

- Several programs exist to help residents pay for broadband access and access devices. Some communities lack the knowledge of such programs and, to increase awareness, the County should conduct thoughtful engagement in the most vulnerable communities to understand how to promote existing initiatives.
- While the County and community partners offer a wide breadth of digital literacy programming for different communities, some populations have limited awareness of the opportunities available to them. Prioritizing language access and translation services in the marketing and deployment of digital literacy programming can help reach these communities.
- There are different lenses through which the County may think about digital literacy to support diverse populations of residents, such as parents and jobs seekers.
- Some Fairfax County residents presently lack the knowledge of what are adequate download speeds.
- Many agencies are providing information about resources, such as devices distribution programs, but inclusive engagement is needed to share information with underrepresented populations.



The Action Plan will contain recommendations to support access, awareness, affordability, adoption, and advancement

Through a rigorous analysis and a series of stakeholder engagement conversations, Fairfax County has identified a number of takeaways and opportunities for implementation to advance digital equity across the County. These takeaways are included below.



Affordability

- Many Fairfax Communities without broadband subscriptions have other compounding vulnerabilities that may impact their ability to afford connections. These challenges also may affect their awareness and adoption of broadband-related services.
- Fairfax has seen impressive ACP enrollment rates throughout the County and can learn from its engagement practices and partnerships that supported enrollment.
- Funding for broadband subsidy programs is an area that Fairfax County will want to examine due to the fact that many households are dependent on the support for connections.
- A distrust for sharing personal information with the government and language barriers for some residents are enrollment barriers to address.
- Populations that do not qualify for federal subsidy programs would benefit from increased awareness of other affordable broadband programs offered by ISPs.



Adoption

- Some residents are unable to participate in the current digital literacy programming due to transportation and time constraints. Flexible program options can open doors and make digital literacy training more inclusive to all Fairfax County community members.
- To ensure equitable digital literacy opportunities, agencies can leverage the Inclusive Community Engagement Framework to ensure that programs are developed in a process of co-creation with the communities they intend to support.



Advancement

- Presently, the County does not have a standardized metric to measure baseline digital literacy competencies within the community. By establishing consistent metrics and measurements of baseline digital literacy competencies, across programs and departments, program administrators could better understand Fairfax County's current levels of mastery and educational need.
- Additional structure, shared goals, and metrics can support the Digital Equity Coordination Team in implementing Countywide initiatives.



The Current State Assessment provides a framework and takeaways to guide the Countywide Digital Equity Action Plan

Insights from the Current State Assessment and leading practices will drive strategies, metrics, and implementation considerations for the Fairfax County Digital Equity Action Plan.

