Digital Equity Capacity Grant Webinar Series

How to Write a Great Grant Application

With the Illinois Office of Broadband

Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

Welcome!

Devon Braunstein
Director
Illinois Office of Broadband

Hillary Rains
Community Engagement Manager
Illinois Office of Broadband

Get To Know You!

In chat: Let us know who you are, what organization you're with, and on a scale of 1-10, how familiar are you with writing grant applications?

1-----I have no experience at all

5-----I am relatively familiar, but would like to build confidence

10---I am a grant application writing expert

Agenda

- Intros-5 min

- Grant Background, State Digital Equity Plan and Timeline-10 min

- How to Write a Great Grant Application

  - Grant Application Process Overview-10 min

  - Essential Grant Components-25 min

    - Project Plan

    - Budgeting

    - Program Narrative

    - Impact Measurement

- Q & A-10 min

Objectives

- Learn about the State Digital Equity Plan and timeline for grant release

- Learn some key terms for grant applicants

- Know the essential grant components, including the program narrative, budget, project plan, and impact measurement

- Learn about Quantitative and Qualitative data and content for your grant application

- Learn about grant help and resources

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

Illinois Office of Broadband

Launched in 2019 with the Connect Illinois initiative

Tasked with connecting every single resident in Illinois with fast, reliable, and affordable internet

- Administering grants for broadband infrastructure (BEAD $1B+) and digital equity ($30M+)
- Engaging regional champions and community organizations

Illinois Broadband Lab

University contributor to Office's broadband partnership

Tasked with research, data gathering, and digital navigation resources

- Lead statewide engagement through public university partnerships (Broadband READY)
  - Illinois Broadband Map
  - Digital Navigator Network

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

What is Digital Equity

Digital Equity:

...is an outcome: It is the state we are working to reach where all Illinoisans have access to the quality and affordable broadband, devices, and skills they need to participate in Illinois' modern economy and thrive. Community members with the **greatest barriers** are empowered towards civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.

...is a process: It is how we do business, by prioritizing access and opportunities for groups that have the greatest need and who are **most impacted by digital inequities.**

Context

2021 Digital Equity Act

The Digital Equity Act provides $2.75 billion to establish three grant programs that promote digital equity and inclusion. Programs aim to ensure that all people and communities have the skills, technology, and capacity needed to reap the full benefits of our digital economy.

Complete

State Planning Grant

Funding for states to <u>create</u> Digital Equity Plans

Our focus for today

Capacity Grant

Funding for states to <u>implement</u> Digital Equity Plans
(~$39M expected for Illinois over 5 years)

Coming soon: ~Fall 2024

Competitive Grant

$1.25B <u>national</u> fund to implement digital equity projects

Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

State Digital Equity Plan Has Been Approved

Approval of the SDEP unlocks the opportunity for Illinois to apply for first Capacity Grant allocation from NTIA of $23.7 million to implement the plan.
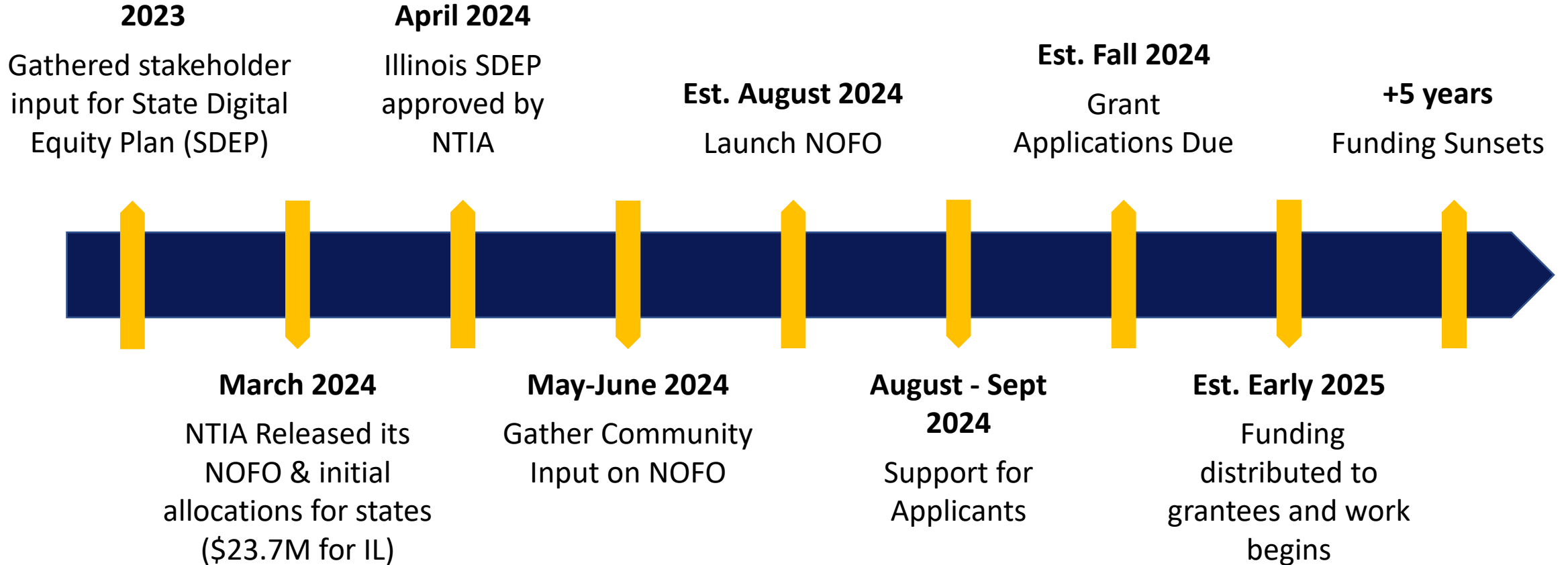
Community of Practice

Digital Equity Source of Truth

Core Activities

Stakeholder Engagement

Digital Equity Grant Program

Statewide and University Partnerships
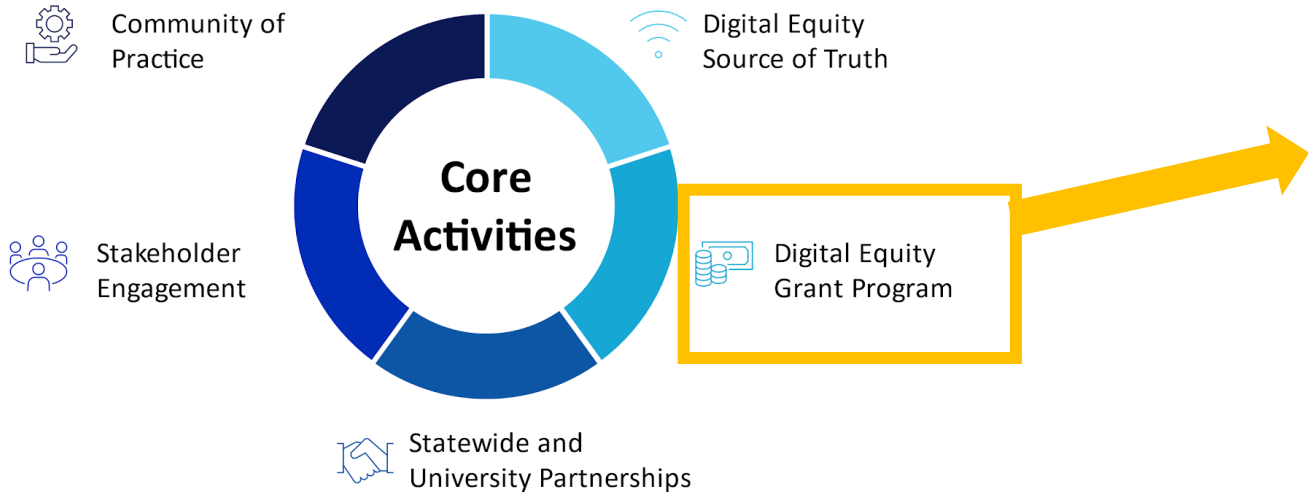
Creating a statewide Digital Equity Grant Program is one of the Plan's Core Activities

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

Timeline for State Digital Equity Grant Program

2023
Gathered stakeholder input for State Digital Equity Plan (SDEP)

April 2024
Illinois SDEP approved by NTIA

Est. August 2024
Launch NOFO

Est. Fall 2024
Grant Applications Due

+5 years
Funding Sunsets

March 2024
NTIA Released its NOFO & initial allocations for states ($23.7M for IL)

May-June 2024
Gather Community Input on NOFO

August - Sept 2024
Support for Applicants

Est. Early 2025
Funding distributed to grantees and work begins

Illinois **Department of Commerce** & Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

What is a NOFO

A "NOFO" is a Notice of Funding Opportunity shared with the public that outlines key information for prospective applicants including:

- Eligible entities for applying
- Timeline and important dates and deadlines
- Grant award amounts
- Application requirements
- Detailed process for applying
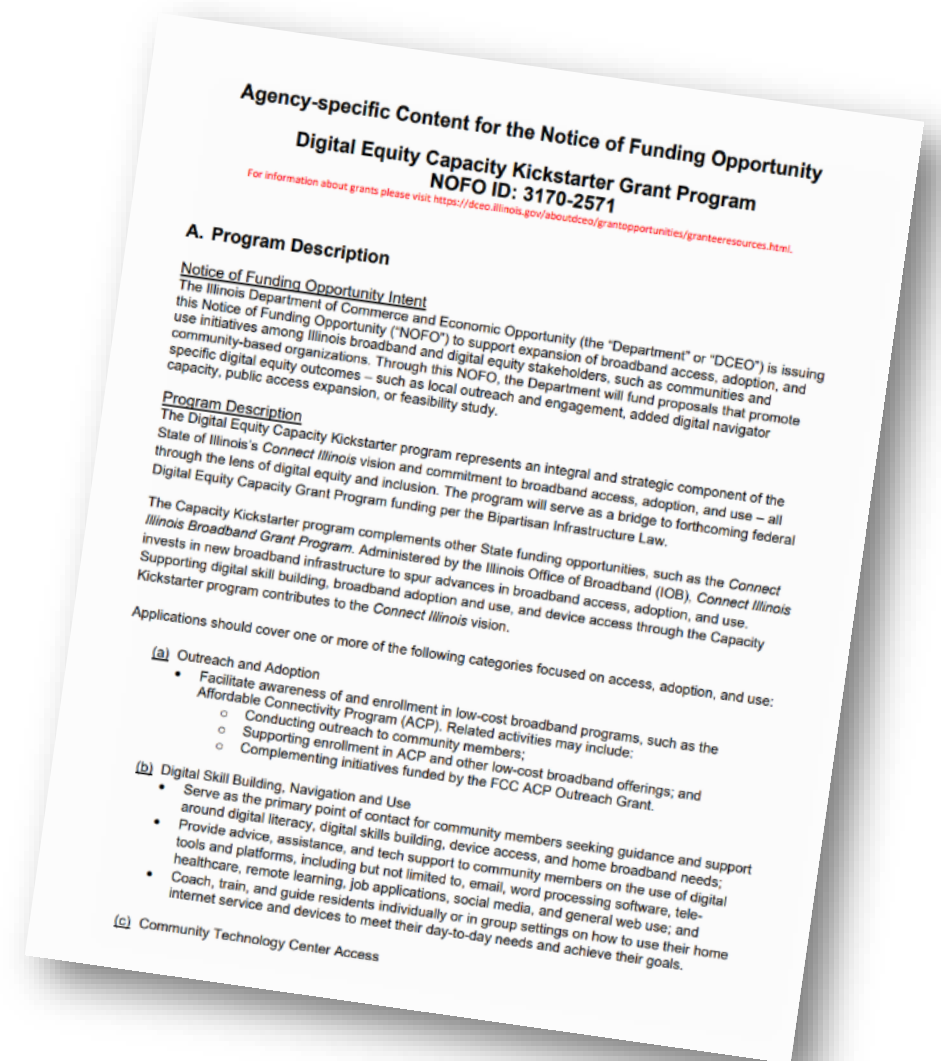
NTIA Requires Prioritization of Covered Populations

Low-income households

Incarcerated individuals

People with disabilities

Racial and ethnic minorities

Aging populations

Veterans

Rural inhabitants

People with language barriers

72% of Illinoisans are part of these identity groups and communities disproportionally impacted by digital inequity

Illinois **Department of Commerce** & Economic Opportunity OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

Tentative Grant Project Types

Subject to change based on design process and adherence to program and agency requirements

Device Distribution Programs	Laptop, computer, or other device distribution to Covered Populations.
Digital Literacy + Skills Training	Classes, workshops, coaching, or other learning opportunities to help Covered Populations build digital skills and confidence.
Digital Navigation + Tech Support	Individuals embedded in community trained to help connect Covered Populations access affordable broadband, digital skill building, and other essential resources.
Broadband Affordability Program	Small infrastructure projects to increase affordability and choice within multi-dwelling units (MDUs), affordable housing, or other residential communities.
Access Expansion Feasibility Study	Opportunity for communities to chart their own broadband path through local coordination and planning.
Coalition Building	Seed funding for regional or local digital equity coalition formation, building, and growth.

How to Write a Great Grant Application

Grants Glossary

Quantitative Data	Data that can be precisely measured and expressed in numbers and percentages, objective, "Hard Data".
Qualitative Data	Data that is interpretation-based, descriptive, narrative in nature.
Inputs	Resources put into a project to make it work, ex. Funds, staff time, etc.—Fuel for the car
Outputs	Activities implemented, services rendered, work done as a part of the project.---The driver moved and turned
Outcomes	Measurable changes brought about by the project. ---The driver drove 10 miles to the store.

The Purpose of a Grant Application

- What are your qualifications?
- How much need does your intended audience have?
- What will you do with the money? (Outputs)
- What impact or changes do you want to make? (Outcomes)
- How will you measure your success (Evaluation)
- Tell Your Story

How Merit Review Works

- Applications are graded based on the requirements in the NOFO and/or additional documents (SDEP)

- Merit review teams award points based on how well your project aligns to the goals set in the NOFO

- Get as many points as possible!

Illinois **Department of Commerce** & Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

How Merit Review Works

- How well does this project fit the grant requirements?

- How much experience does this program have with projects like this?

- Is the plan well thought out and detailed?

- Will the impact be of an appropriate size for our target demographic?

- What are the goals and targets, and are they detailed and achievable?

- Do I know what this project means to the community?

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

More Questions to Ask Yourself Before Applying

- Is this grant a good fit for my project?

- Is the juice worth the squeeze?

  - *Will the amount awarded from the grant be worth the staff time and effort of applying and managing the grant?*

- How long will this grant support this project?

- Is this program sustainable without the grant funds?

- Who will be responsible for grant management, budgeting, and reporting?

More Questions to Ask Yourself Before Applying

- Do you have:
  - A project leader?
  - A NOFO or RFP to work from?
  - A template for the application?
  - A GATA Certification plus eligibility checklist?
  - A timeline for completion of application?
  - A plan for reporting if/when you are funded?

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

Essential Grant Components

- Program Narrative
- Budgeting
- Project Plan
- Impact Measurement
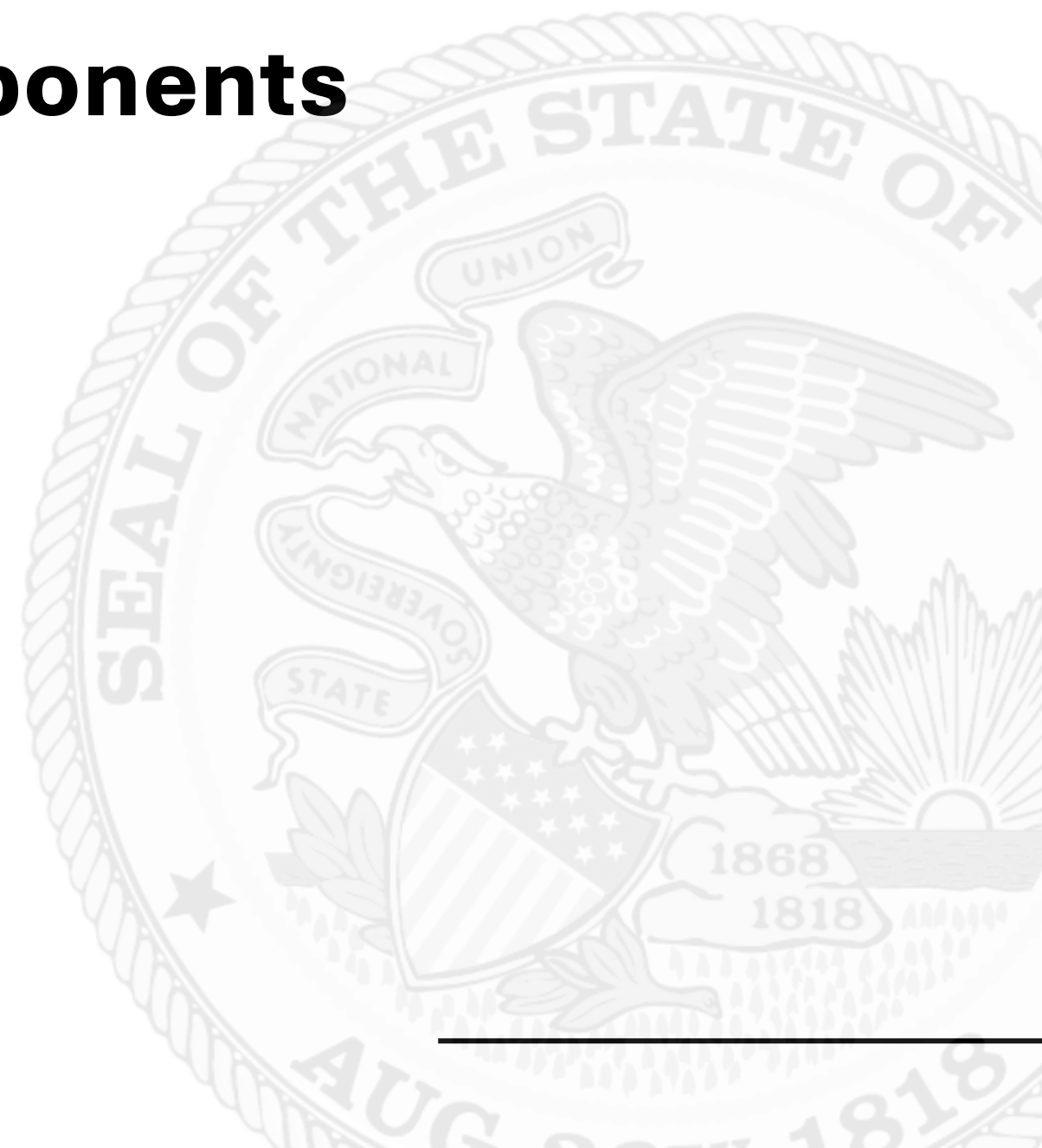
Project Plan

- PLAN YOUR PROJECT FIRST
- What does the grant require?!
  - Partnerships
  - Audience (Covered Population)
  - Activities (Outputs)
  - Intended Impact (Outcomes)
  - Timeline
  - Purchasing

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

Digital Equity State Grant Program NOFO Specifics – Alignment to NTIA Requirements

Application Component	Guidance / Tips
Project category	Applications should cover at least one of six project types: • Device Distribution • Digital Literacy and Skills Training • Digital Navigation and Tech Support • Broadband Affordability Programs • Access Expansion Feasibility Studies • Coalition Building
Audience served	Projects must specifically serve one or more of the identified NTIA Covered Populations

Note: For initial educational purposes. Not a comprehensive list of all application components.

Digital Equity State Grant Program NOFO Specifics – Other evaluation factors

Application Component	Guidance / Tips
Community Need	Economic need in community, current state of services in community, number of covered population in need
Capacity	Similar experience with digital equity projects, impact of past work, number and experience of individual staff, training needs, and ability to collaborate on other projects
Proposal Quality	Demonstrate that digital equity outcomes are realistic for population and timeframe, detailed plan, and quantitative measures of impact
Community Support	Amount of community support evidenced by letters of support, project's use of community partnerships to increase impact
Matching Funds	Encouraged, but not required

Note: For initial educational purposes. Not a comprehensive list of all application components.

Budgeting

- Uniform Grant Budget Template
    - A well-prepared budget should be reasonable and demonstrate that the funds being asked for will be used wisely.
    - The budget should be as concrete and specific as possible in its estimates. Make every effort to be realistic, to estimate costs accurately.
- Personnel (Salary) and Fringe Benefits
- Travel, Training, and Education
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Contractual or Consultant Services
- Telecommunications

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

Budgeting

Program Narrative

Use your program plan to write your narrative

Use data and storytelling to tell the story of your program, but still be specific!

This is your chance to tell us everything about your project and WHY you are doing it.

Impact Measurement

- Plan for Evaluation NOW
  - Most of these <u>planned</u> changes will be quantitative
- Quantitative Changes
  - Number of participants, number of people with devices, percentage of people indicating learning on a survey, etc
- Qualitative Changes-Share in reporting
  - Participant stories or feedback, staff observations, etc.
- Know your Before so that you can measure your After!

Quantitative (~60-75%)

- 80% of participants will be able to pass a final assessment with 80% or higher.

- Program participants will rise from 20 to 100 in one year

- 500 devices will be distributed over the course of the program

- Consultants will deliver a comprehensive feasibility report, and host 15 community programs with 1000 attendees

Qualitative (~25-40%)

- 80% or participants will indicate that they have higher levels of confidence on final survey

- Staff noticed that participants in the Tuesday night class began fearfully, but by the end of the program, they were able to navigate websites confidently.

- Participant A noted that they felt more comfortable helping their child with homework since taking the class.

Application Content--Quantitative

- How well do you know your community right now?
- How well do you know your project?
- How plugged into the ecosystem are you?

- Census Data
- Illinois Broadband Map
- Illinois Broadband Lab Dashboards
- Illinois Report Card
- Local Agency Specific Data-Housing Authority, Health Department, Library Unemployment Office, Industry

Application Content--Quantitative

State Digital Equity Plan

Today, 2.9 million Illinois residents in 1.3 million households lack a subscription to high-speed internet in their homes.[7] This gap may be caused by one or more inter-related factors (see Section 3.2, Needs Assessment):

Availability of broadband infrastructure

5%

5% of broadband-serviceable locations (BSLs) in Illinois do not have access to 25/3 Mbps internet service and are categorized as "unserved" by the FCC.[8] Some 4% of BSLs do not have access to 100/20 Mbps internet service and are thus categorized as "underserved."[9]

Affordability of internet subscriptions

17%

of Illinois residents find it difficult to afford their internet bill, and 14% have experienced interruptions in service because they had difficulty paying.[10]

Find resources in your communities too!

Fresh data, no earlier than 2020, unless you are doing a comparison

---

Illinois Report Card

Illinois Broadband Map

Benton Institute ACP Enrollment Tool

US Census Data

Application Content--Qualitative

- Why does your project deserve to be funded?
- Who does this project help?
- What need is your project targeting?

Helpful Quantitative Data Resources:

- Census Data
- Illinois Broadband Map
- Illinois Broadband Lab Dashboards
- Illinois Report Card
- Local Agency Specific Data-Housing Authority, Health Department, Library Unemployment Office, Industry

Application Content--Qualitative

"It took me two months to get someone from the internet service provider to come out. Someone told me over the phone that I would be covered, but it wasn't true."

- A participant in the Effingham listening session

"We live in a neighborhood with many multi-unit houses, so density is an issue; there are lots of paying customers there, but I haven't heard of one family being able to use more than one device at home."

- A participant living in a multi-dwelling unit building

"Students live on really thin margins. A failing computer could be the deciding factor of being able to finish the semester or dropping out.

- A listening session participant

Staff noticed that participants in the Tuesday night class began fearfully, but by the end of the program, they were able to navigate websites confidently. (past impact)

Assorted Tips and Tricks

- Use the Question in the Answer
  - *List Grant Activities----Agency will be implementing the following grant activities*
- Answer Every Part of Every Question
- Third Person, not First Person
- Have a "Red Team"
- Don't Be Scared to Reach Out
- Realistic Metrics
- DO NOT Wait Until Deadline Day

If You Get Stuck

- Grant Application Technical Support
- Overarching Grant Questions
- Project Specifics, Specific Applications

- Email us at broadband@illinois.gov

State Digital Equity Plan

Final plan now LIVE!

Executive Summary is available in 6 languages
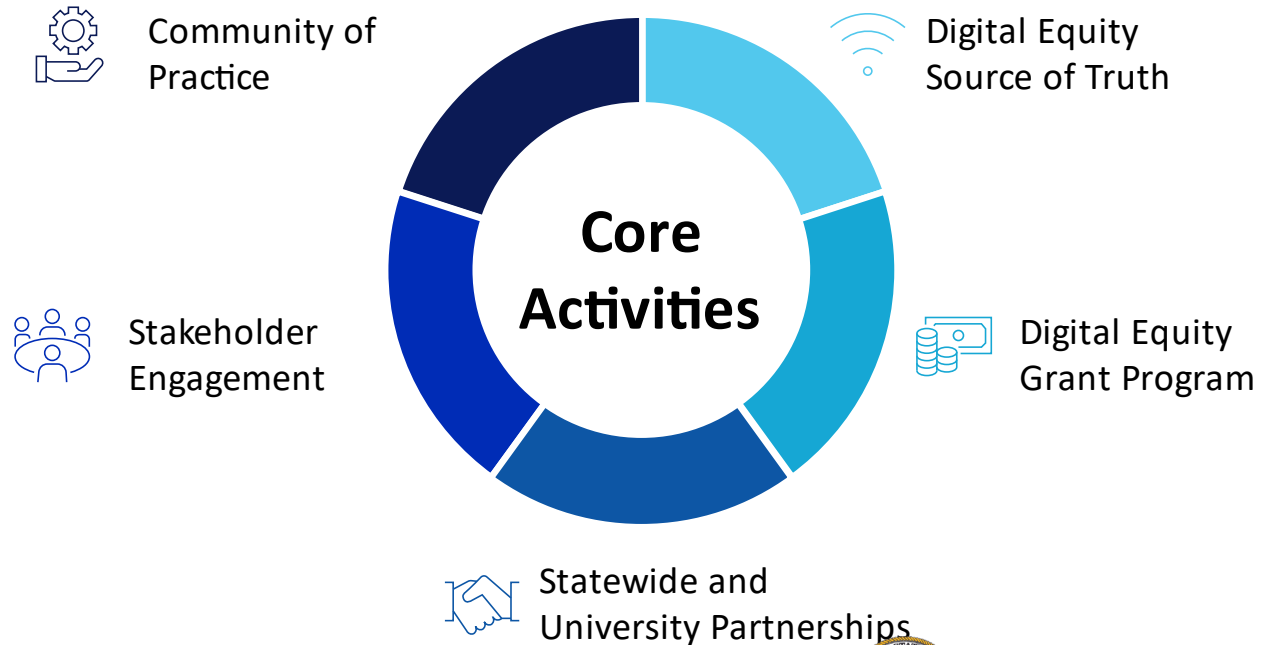
Community of Practice

Digital Equity Source of Truth

Stakeholder Engagement

Core Activities

Digital Equity Grant Program

Statewide and University Partnerships

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS BROADBAND LAB

Upcoming Grant Capacity Building Workshops

Capacity building workshops help ensure grant opportunities are inclusive and accessible

June 12: Building a Strong Digital Inclusion Program

Hear from successful digital skill building and digital navigator programs about how to structure a program mission, measure outputs and outcomes, and determine metrics for success.

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

Be Our Partner!

Fill out our partner form!

Receive the most up-to-date information about grant programs, action items, and get inspired by other #IllinoisBroadbandStories

bit.ly/IOBPartner

- Sign up for the Illinois Broadband Connections Newsletter at

    https://bit.ly/IOBNewsletter

- Follow the Illinois Broadband Lab on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn

Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF BROADBAND

ILLINOIS
BROADBAND
LAB

Thank You!