Digital Equity Forum Report

Pursuant to Sec. 129(70)(a) of Chapter 334, Laws of 2022 (the biennial operating budget)

Washington State
Department of
Commerce

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Legislative mandate

In its 2021 regular session, the Washington State Legislature passed [Chapter 334, Laws of 2021](#) (the biennial operating budget). It included Section 129 (70)(a)), establishing a new governing entity in the Digital Equity Forum. The Legislature provided funding "for the statewide broadband office to co-facilitate the Washington digital equity forum with the Washington state office of equity. The purpose of the forum is to develop recommendations to advance digital connectivity in Washington state."

This forum was to:

- Develop goals that are consistent with the goals of the governor's statewide broadband office, as provided in [RCW 43.330.536](#)
- Strengthen public-private partnerships
- Solicit public input through public hearings or informational sessions
- Work to increase collaboration and communication between local, state, and federal governments and agencies
- Recommend reforms to universal service mechanisms

The Digital Equity Forum was co-facilitated by the Washington State Broadband Office and the State Office of Equity with membership appointed by the directors of both organizations prioritizing:

- Federally recognized tribes
- State agencies involved in digital equity
- Underserved and unserved communities, including historically disadvantaged communities

In addition, the budget proviso provided for up to four members to be appointed ex officio, representing both chambers of the State Senate and State House of Representatives. The budget proviso calls for the Washington State Broadband Office to provide a final report to the Legislature on January 1, 2023.

Letter from the co-chairs

Both the Office of Equity and the State Broadband Office wish to report, by way of this letter, on the efforts undertaken by the Digital Equity Forum under the guidance of both offices to meet the requirements as established under Chapter 334, Laws of 2021 (ESSB 5092 including Section 129 (70)(a)). First and foremost, both offices wish to offer the most sincere gratitude for the appointed members of the Digital Equity Forum for their dedication to addressing digital equity and contributing their time and expertise to the State of Washington as it takes steps to bridge the digital divide for all who call Washington their home. Second, both offices wish to express the most sincere gratitude to members of the public who contributed to this process by sharing their own lived experiences with digital inequities. Whether through submitting public comment, participating in a focus group, or by taking our community survey, your voice has been heard and will help to shape the future for digital equity in Washington.

Office of Equity and Broadband Office, a new partnership

The budget proviso creating the Digital Equity Forum specified that it be co-led by the Washington State Broadband Office (WSBO) and the newly established Governor's Office of Equity. In the middle of 2021, both organizations were in early stages of growth, focusing on standing up new programs while meeting new state requirements. WSBO was working to implement new programs to connect unserved and underserved communities with broadband service, and to take a newly active role in digital equity. The Office of Equity, with very limited resources, was tasked with an ambitious statewide goal of integrating a pro-equity and anti-racist framework throughout state government. Despite these early challenges, both organizations leaned in to this new challenge of convening the Digital Equity Forum because of the significant impact on Washingtonians.

An initial priority for the Washington State Broadband Office was contracting with an expert consulting team to facilitate Digital Equity Forum meetings and listening sessions with people from underserved communities to better understand the greater digital equity landscape in Washington. Developing a working relationship and a common understanding of the goals and objectives for the Forum was an initial priority for leadership and staff.

Both offices partnered to develop a list of potential candidates for the forum. By fall 2021, 29 individuals representing numerous communities had been appointed to the Digital Equity Forum, with an additional four elected officials serving in an ex-officio capacity.

Convening the Digital Equity Forum

The timing for the deliverable as required by the Digital Equity Forum budget proviso was ambitious, calling for convening a stakeholder group to develop recommendations for inclusion in a final legislative report due at the end of 2022. Both the Office of Equity and State Broadband Office began the process by December of 2021, reaching out to potential members and having conversations to better understand the greater digital equity landscape in Washington. Both offices coordinated toward developing a list of potential candidates for the Forum, who received individual appointment invitations in fall of 2021. Ultimately, the Forum consisted of 30 appointed members, with four elected officials serving in an ex-officio capacity.

Through consultation from the Washington State Attorney General's Office, we determined that the Forum be structured similarly to other state boards, advisory committees, and commissions, and that the business of this body be conducted in compliance with the Washington Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA). Designing the work of the Digital Equity Forum in compliance with OPMA necessitated particular attention to these

requirements and a level of formality for meetings and membership most commonly associated with other state decision-making bodies.

The contractor, The Athena Group, convened the 29-member forum four times between December 2021 and October 2022. Meetings were held virtually, under the Governor's emergency orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and were subject to the OPMA. Meetings were open to the public through both internet and call-in options. The Athena Group facilitated meetings with considerations for language accessibility: ASL interpreters, Communication Access Real Time (CART) services, and reviewing meeting materials for visual accessibility. All materials are viewable on the [project website](#).

In October 2022, community stakeholders and members of the forum requested a meeting with the Digital Equity Forum co-leads to express their dissatisfaction with the way the feedback they provided in listening sessions and during work group meetings was handled; they stated that the process used resulted in recommendations that did not truly reflect the input and experience of participants.

Receiving this feedback, both co-chairs decided to pause further meetings to reflect and to consider options for moving forward. Both the Office of Equity and the State Broadband Office commit to taking steps to ensure that those who are directly involved and impacted design the future work of the forum.

Listening to stakeholders and understanding digital equity

Digital Equity Forum at-large meetings
Over the course of the project, four Digital Equity Forum at-large meetings[1] were convened online via the Zoom meeting platform. The Digital Equity Forum at-large meetings prioritized public engagement in several ways. First, a space near the beginning of each at-large meeting was explicitly reserved for public comment, so that the experiences, perspectives, and voices of the public could be at the forefront of members' minds during the subsequent meeting. Second, members of the public were provided with access to a dedicated email address and telephone line to share their thoughts after meetings concluded.

Digital Equity Forum small-group workshops
To fully make use of the expertise and experience present in the Digital Equity Forum membership, the project leadership determined that this project needed to be a blend of both deliberation (information sharing, reflection and co-creation) and activation. The activation-oriented meetings took several different forms in alignment with the dynamic needs of the overall project. The initial small-group workshops[2] were focused on providing space to define the mission, vision, and values of the Digital Equity Forum, and piloting the design of the public listening session meetings. The next three sets of small-group workshops[3] were focused on creating, refining and finalizing recommendations based on identified barriers to digital equity.

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[1] December 2021, April 2022, June 2022, September 2022, and October 2022
[2] February 2022, March 2022
[3] July 2022, August 2022, and September 2022

meeting. Second, members of the public were provided with access to a dedicated email address to share their thoughts after meetings concluded.

Public listening sessions
Given the complexity of the project and the realization that the at-large meetings would only allow for limited contributions from members of the public, four 90-minute public listening sessions were held in March and May. Three central goals were established and communicated for each public listening session:

- Providing an accessible space for all voices to be heard in response to listening session questions
- Identifying barriers/challenges to internet use in Washington state
- Identifying community needs related to digital equity.

The following four questions were presented (in English and Spanish) during each listening session.

1. Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

2. What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

3. What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job?

4. What can Washington state government do to help you improve your access to the internet?

Digital Equity Survey
An online survey, accessible in 17 languages (including American Sign Language), was co-developed to reach Washington residents to better understand challenges to accessing and using the internet. The survey was kept brief by using the same questions asked in the community listening sessions. Responses were tracked by county, as well as week-on-week, to determine the effectiveness of targeted ad buys on social media. The survey was available for 45 days and more than 2,500 total responses were received from Washington residents.

Focus groups
While the community listening sessions and community survey allowed Washingtonians to share their experiences, perspectives and thoughts on digital equity, it was understood that relying heavily on electronic methods for discourse would likely preclude the involvement of communities that are most acutely experiencing digital inequities. To help listen to people with lived experience, the Equity in Education Coalition (EEC) and Goodwill generously volunteered to help coordinate four in-person focus groups across the state. Both organizations actively support communities representing a diversity of languages, geographies, and lived experiences throughout Washington. Staff from EEC and Goodwill co-facilitated meetings with community members they work with and ensured accessibility measures were taken to remove barriers to participation. These accessibility measures included: child care, food and refreshments, take-home COVID tests, live simultaneous interpretation, translated meeting materials, transportation, and a living wage stipend. Focus groups were held in Ephrata, Pasco, Seattle, and Tacoma.

Stakeholder engagement — initial findings

The Athena Group and forum members received feedback from about 2,700 Washington residents in the listening sessions, focus groups, public meetings, and an online survey. From this feedback, four key themes emerged after analysis by The Athena Group:

- Higher quality broadband service: Faster and more reliable service needs to be available to more people at more affordable rates and from more providers.
- Expanded access: Expansion of broadband internet access must be coupled with culturally informed efforts to elevate digital literacy and digital skills for broader adoption to occur.
- Quality equipment is needed: Varied quality of internet access equipment (such as modems, Wi-Fi routers, etc.) negatively affects broadband access.
- Role of state government: There is a desire to see internet service provider deficiencies addressed through effective regulation and the development of new state programs and initiatives to more effectively underserved communities.

In addition to these themes, other commonly expressed experiences and perceptions heard consistently include:

- Accessibility barriers to using the internet for those lacking either the skills or resources to fully use the internet.
- Data on broadband service availability is inaccurate and does not help identify who truly is unserved or underserved.
- Efforts to address broadband internet access must focus on community based organizations, small businesses and nonprofits, in addition to individuals and households.

The full reporting of stakeholder input is provided in the attached report appendices (B through G).

How will this information be used?

Early inputs to the state digital equity planning process
The State Broadband Office will soon begin a digital equity planning process as required to be eligible for federal broadband and digital equity funding being administered by the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA). Among the requirements for this planning work is to identify barriers that are experienced by Washington residents that contribute to digital inequity. During the small-group workshops, members developed a list of barriers to digital equity, which will serve as an input to the federal digital equity planning process. Having a portion of this work developed before the inception of this process greatly assists the state of Washington in developing this plan.

Early public involvement
Results of the public engagement efforts are included as appendices to this letter to be referenced as future engagements are undertaken to address digital equity in Washington. Through public comment, public listening sessions, focus groups, and the more than 2,700 individuals that took the time to contribute their experiences to the process, a substantial amount of information has been collected that will inform future phases of work to address digital inequity by Washington state government. The voices of all who contributed during this stage of the Digital Equity Forum will be considered as direct inputs into the future work program as well as for the forthcoming digital equity planning process.

Challenges

Reliance upon online methods of meetings and outreach
Both the Office of Equity and the State Broadband Office are well aware of the limitations in conducting a public process consisting largely of online meetings and survey techniques to better understand the needs of

those who lack access to, or the ability to effectively, use the internet. While there were limitations to public engagement due to the governor's emergency orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic, more must be done in the future to truly listen to and engage unserved and underserved communities. Despite efforts in in the second half of this project to engage stakeholders through in-person focus groups, much more will be needed in future phases to ensure that the experiences and perspectives of all Washingtonians are truly heard and better understood. One especially important learning was the value of trusted community leaders and community liaisons. These individuals have credibility between and within communities, especially those that are unserved and underserved. An outreach effort from a state agency, regardless of the sender, can be "invisible" without a trusted community member vouching for the outreach. Future efforts will need to be intentional in outreach methods that effectively engage those who are not connected.

Staffing and capacity

As mentioned, both the Office of Equity and the Broadband Office are new offices charged with starting new programs that are of great importance for the state of Washington. The additional challenge of starting and co-facilitating a highly visible stakeholder group with high expectations proved to be a challenge that both offices had not fully appreciated, in terms of both staff time and resources. Indeed, the Washington State Broadband Office hired its director, Mark Vasconi in April 2022, fully five months into the process. Future Digital Equity Forum efforts should be undertaken following intentional design and the assignment of sufficient resources.

Timing

Conducting the work of the Digital Equity Forum and building a new advisory body requires time for members and staff to get to know each other to build trust and to effectively make changes to the process based on what we learn along the way. Members of the forum expressed dissatisfaction with methods used, with many feeling that more time and effort was needed to finalize the work of the group, including any recommendations that might be made for a final report. Future Digital Equity Forum efforts will be strengthened by empowering members to be more in control of the schedule for deliverables.

Size of membership and governance of Digital Equity Forum

The budget proviso that created the Digital Equity Forum was very specific in terms of the broad stakeholder representation that the forum was required to include in its membership. Both the Office of Equity and the State Broadband Office appreciate the need to be inclusive in decision-making; however, the breadth of prescribed interests that must be included as official members led to more than 40 appointment offers for membership. The number of members in official meetings was too large to effectively conduct work in the manner that members desired. A more limited forum membership structure, and establishing specific sub-committees that more closely resembles other state decision-making bodies, would strengthen and focus the work of the Digital Equity Forum. While the exact governance and organization of the Digital Equity Forum will require consideration informed by this past year's work, individual members must be able to pursue inclusive work with broader groups of stakeholders in a manner that honors the needs of communities throughout the state by meeting them where they are and represent each community's needs.

Open Public Meetings Act requirements

The Attorney General's office recommended that the work of the Digital Equity Forum be conducted in compliance with OPMA, meaning that rules around meeting quorums and notifications needed to be followed. Members expressed dissatisfaction with the level of formality in the meetings and wished for less formal arrangements to be made to conduct the work. An example of member dissatisfaction was an interest in creating an email list so that all members could communicate and share resources, however such an exchange is considered an impromptu public meeting and in violation of OPMA.

Inability to respond sufficiently to members' desires in conducting the process

Both the Office of Equity and the State Broadband Office fully recognize that this process was cumbersome and did not respond to many of the desires of members regarding the conduct of the forum during the brief time we had to conduct the work. Many of the constraints detailed previously were contributing factors in how the Digital Equity Forum work program was ultimately carried out, but that does not change the fact that more could be done to design a program that truly reflects the desires of membership. As the Digital Equity Forum pivots from the initial responsibilities as outlined in the original budget proviso to those identified in Chapter 265, Laws of 2022 (HB 1723), a more intentional effort should be undertaken to ensure that an inclusive design is established with direct involvement of both members and key stakeholders.

Much work remains

Both the Office of Equity and the State Broadband Office initiated the process of creating and co-facilitating a new Digital Equity Forum with the intention of fulfilling the required deliverables as detailed in the budget proviso. These deliverables were:

- Develop goals that are consistent with the goals of the governor's statewide broadband office, as provided in RCW 43.330.536
- Strengthen public-private partnerships
- Solicit public input through public hearings or informational sessions
- Work to increase collaboration and communication between local, state, and federal governments and agencies
- Recommend reforms to universal service mechanisms

As outlined herein, the Digital Equity Forum fell short of accomplishing all of these objectives in the time given. A future version of the Digital Equity Forum will want to pick up where this process left off, building on the work that has been done to meet these objectives. While the tasks required of the Digital Equity Forum were not completed, the Digital Equity Forum can be proud of the achievements made to date. These include:

- Significant stakeholder input that will not only inform any future version of the Digital Equity Forum, but will also directly inform the statewide digital equity planning process.
- Raising the visibility of digital equity statewide.
- Providing important lessons on how to design a stronger process the next time.

Next steps

Moving forward, the Digital Equity Forum will need to continue to implement requirements encoded in Chapter 265, Laws of 2022 (HB 1723). Generally, the legislation establishes the Digital Equity Forum as a permanent body with membership from federally recognized tribes, relevant state agencies, and historically disadvantaged, unserved and underserved communities. It also provides for the appointment of an administrative chairperson (see section 306). The legislation also requires that the Digital Equity Forum has an active role in providing input in determining which organizations are funded by the State Broadband Office that:

- Expand digital equity opportunities (See section 304)
- Develop digital equity plans for discrete regions of the state (see section 305).

In continuing the forum, the Office of Equity and the State Broadband Office will create subcommittees to increase direct engagement from forum members and community members who are directly impacted by existing and systemic digital inequities. We also heard interest in creating a more informal roundtable that

does not make decisions but allows for information sharing about items of mutual interest, similar to the legislative working group established during the COVID-19 pandemic response. Finally, we will structure agendas to tap into the resources that different members bring to the table. For example, we can draw from members with industry, government, and technical expertise to provide briefings for other participants about state and federal program opportunities, timelines, challenges, and how other states are establishing sustainable digital equity programs aligned with, but not fully dependent on, federal funding. At the same time, we are committed to centering community voices as a primary guide for the work and for establishing the values that direct the forum's priorities and metrics used to evaluate our success. We are committed to empowering community voices to provide continuous feedback on the efficacy of the programs as they are implemented.

These efforts will require resources and staffing for the Office of Equity and the Washington State Broadband Office to properly accomplish the legislation's goals of supporting digital equity by promoting universal access to broadband services, supporting affordability programs, and advancing the adoption of digital services. Furthermore, we will work with legislators to seek clarification on the role that committee members should play in awarding funding. Learnings gathered from the Digital Equity Forum's effort in 2022 will serve as guideposts in moving forward to meet the requirements of the legislation.

Appendix A: Digital Equity Forum membership

Membership

Work group members provided support for the research and analysis completed by the State Office of Equity and the Washington State Broadband Office. Their feedback was invaluable to the research process, and we will consider its application to the work moving forward.

The Digital Equity Forum was co-facilitated by the Washington State Broadband Office and the State Office of Equity. Members were appointed by the directors of both organizations, prioritizing:

- Federally recognized tribes
- State agencies involved in digital equity
- Underserved and unserved communities, including historically disadvantaged communities

In addition, the legislation provided for up to four members to be appointed ex officio, representing both chambers of the State Senate and State House of Representatives.

Name	Organization
Co-Chair - Karen A. Johnson, Ph.D.	Office of Equity
Co-Chair - Mark Vasconi	State Broadband Office (June 1, 2022-Oct. 20, 2022)
Co-Chair - Ernie Rasmussen	State Broadband Office (Dec. 9, 2021-May 30, 2022)
Matt Boehnke	Washington State House of Representatives (Ex Officio Member)
Mia Gregerson	Washington State House of Representatives (Ex Officio Member)
Shelly Short	Washington State Senate (Ex Officio Member)
Lisa Wellman	Washington State Senate (Ex Officio Member)
Jon Claymore	Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Office of Native Education
Elizabeth Gordon	Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
Sameth Mel	Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs
Sharon Miracle	Yakima Valley Community Foundation
Agaiotupu Viena	Washington State LGBTQ Commission
Cindy Aden	Schools, Health and Libraries Broadband Coalition

Name	Organization
Melvinjohn Ashue	Hoh Tribe
Jim Bamberger	Office of Civil Legal Aid
Tiffany Circle	Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Eu-wanda Eagans	Goodwill of the Olympics & Rainier Region
Jennie Harvell	Washington Health Care Authority
Jesus Hernandez	Family Health Centers of Okanogan
Darryl Hunt	King County
Rituja Indapure	Washington State Women's Commission
Bill Kehoe	Washington State Office of the Chief Information Officer
David Keyes	City of Seattle
Sharayah Lane	Philanthropy Northwest
Trevor Lane	Washington State University
Cathleen MacCaul	AARP
Sharonne Navas	Equity in Education Coalition
Ed Prince	Washington State Commission on African American Affairs
Renee Rooker	Walla Walla Housing Authority
Lisa Rosenblum	King County Library System
Laura Ruderman	Technology Alliance
Maria Siguenza	Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Amanda Six	Libraries of Stevens County
Bre Urness-Straight	Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Jessica James Zinda	Department of Social and Health Services
Anna Zivarts	Disability Rights Washington

Appendix B: Identified barriers to digital equity

As identified by Digital Equity Forum members

Contributions by members of the Digital Equity Forum and those from community listening sessions were used to identify the following 16 barriers to digital equity. Each barrier includes a summary statement and at least one quote that describes the barrier in the exact words from a community stakeholder. Quotes are unedited.

1) **The quality of equipment used to access the internet.**
   a) We heard that low-quality equipment, such as routers and hotspots, create a barrier for individuals and organizations.
   b) Illustrative/representative quotes
      i) "We are having to pay for multiple lines of service because we have to use a proprietary WiFi router that is just not good enough to get service to all our clients."
      ii) "Is there not some way that Xfinity can be required to give us better routers? I know we can buy our own, but what they give you with the package is so low quality that it almost requires you to buy one from the store to even get good coverage."

2) **Too few internet service provider options.**
   a) Participants described situations where they only had a single option for an internet service provider. They expressed the belief that more options would have a positive impact.
   b) Illustrative/representative quotes
      i) "I would like to spend more money to have a better connection but there is only one option that is no good."
      ii) "I see how the big cities have a lot of options and then people can really choose and be picky and that makes it so the internet companies have to work to be competitive. All of that helps the customer, but none of that is happening where I live and there's only one game in town."

3) **Need for basic minimum service standards.**
   a) Participants shared the negative impacts that comes from what they perceived and described as the internet service providers' being able to choose the quality of service they provided.
   b) Illustrative/representative quotes
      i) "It doesn't seem fair. Why can't there just be a guarantee that you'll get a certain level of service at a certain price, no matter where you live?"
      ii) "It is just too important these days for there not to be some kind of floor or base level that they have to provide to people. If you're selling me a service that is so slow I cannot do anything, you should not get to be a seller."

4) **Affordability of internet service.**
   a) Participants identified affordability as a barrier, specifically sharing how certain types and levels of service are unaffordable or feel too expensive.
   b) Illustrative/representative quotes
      i) "Thankfully, I can afford the only internet option we have in our area: satellite. However, many of my neighbors and friends have to go without because it's just so expensive."

ii) "Why can't we have affordable options like they do in other cities in Washington? It just feels unfair that my son gets higher quality service for less per month than I do, just because he is living in Seattle."

5) **Quality of internet connections, specifically reliability and stability.**
   a) Participants said that unreliable or unstable internet connections create a significant barrier for their personal and professional usage.
   b) Illustrative/representative quotes
      i) "I pay for the highest tier service available, but it still goes in and out."
      ii) "There are certain things, like work and important stuff, where I have learned I can't do it from home because I might get embarrassed or look bad to my boss. I have to go to my office or go to the library … The internet connection at my home is just not reliable for anything other than some basic stuff."

6) **Accessibility for those with disabilities and special needs remains a challenge.**
   a) Participants discussed barriers created as a result of inaccessible internet-related services and approaches, such as customer/technical support that is not designed for individuals with disabilities.
   b) Participants said accessibility affects other serves around the internet, such as light colors and technical support.
      i) "I cannot tell you whether or not the light is blue or red."
      ii) "Me being on the web is too important for the customer service to not be better and more understanding of me as a senior citizen who did not grow up with the internet and computers."

7) **Universal design and ease of use are not taken into consideration for government websites.**
   a) Participants expressed appreciation for governments making more forms and services available online. However, participants also shared frustration based on their experiences and perceptions of there not being a common or universal design approach to government websites.
   b) Illustrative/representative quote
      i) "More and more governments are putting forms and service stuff online, but almost every single government website is different. Is there some way there can be a standard where if you know one website you understand them all, or at least generally know how to get around?"

8) **Too much focus on traditional internet connections, such as cable, while many users are connecting via cellphones and hotspots.**
   a) Participants said it is important for digital connection efforts focus beyond traditional connection types for desktops and laptops. Participants said it is important that other types of connections are considered when expanding or improving internet access.
   b) Illustrative/representative quotes
      i) "It doesn't really matter to me and my family and most of my friends what kind of service is coming into the house, other than the speed I can get on my phone and in my hotspot."
      ii) "In rural and some communities with more poverty, the only way people are connecting is with their cellphone and maybe a hotspot to a tablet."

9) **Government not doing more to improve access to the internet.**

a) Participants shared a belief that government could do more to improve access to the internet, which would increase the government's positive impact on digital equity.

b) Illustrative/representative quote

   i) "We cannot just leave this to consumers and people who get angry enough to complain on the phone. These companies make a lot of money and government is the only group with enough power to make them give us the service we need for modern life."

10) **An incomplete map and incomprehensive understanding of digital connectivity in Washington state.**

a) Participants expressed their perceptions that there is no accurate understanding of internet connectivity in Washington. Participants felt this was a barrier because it can enable internet service providers to say there was more and better coverage than what exists, as well as creating a barrier for identifying areas where attention is needed.

b) Illustrative/representative quotes

   i) "The connectivity maps just aren't true, so they give the providers a way to say they are doing better than they are actually doing."

   ii) "If you listen to the internet companies, you'd think we have some of the best internet access in the U.S., but that's simply not true. Unless we get an accurate picture of where we stand, then it's just not realistic to think anything will change."

11) **Not enough efforts focus specifically on the needs of small business and non-profits.**

a) Participants discussed the importance of helping small businesses and non-profit organizations. The potential to primarily focus efforts on individuals is seen as a barrier to improving broadband connectivity and digital literacy in Washington.

b) Illustrative/representative quote

   i) "Let's not just focus on individuals … We need to remember our small businesses and nonprofits that might also not know the best ways to use the internet for their benefit."

12) **The quality of internet connections is not keeping pace with innovations and users' needs.**

a) Participants discussed the increasing availability of online forms by public sector organizations and telehealth offerings, but said those efforts could be diluted or undermined when people didn't have a strong and/or reliable internet connection.

b) Illustrative/representative quotes

   i) "Not having a strong or reliable connection means you might not get hired, you might not get the promotion, or you might not be able to work from home."

   ii) "I think it's great that my representative will meet with his constituents over Zoom, but it felt horrible when my connection dropped during two separate meetings I had scheduled with him."

13) **No — or too few — requirements for timely restoration after internet outages.**

a) Participants expressed their perception that there is a need for greater requirements for internet service providers to restore service after an outage. Dimensions of this barrier included generators on cell towers and time limits on when service must be restored.

b) Illustrative/representative quotes

   i) "The electricity and telephone come back so fast. Why does it take so long for the internet to come back? There need to be more requirements for cable companies to get stuff back online. It's just too important."

    ii) "When internet outages happen, it is a complete work stoppage in terms of the work my staff can do as well as the access we can provide to the community. It can sometimes take almost a week before the internet is fixed. That's just not acceptable in these times when everything is on the internet."

14) **Many Washingtonians need digital literacy and skills training.**
    a) Participants shared how it is important that people receive training on how to use the internet, both the equipment to access the internet and internet services. This barrier concerns how and what people will be able to do once they are provided a connection to the internet.
    b) Illustrative/representative quotes
        i) "It's not enough to just give people an internet connection ... Many of those people who haven't had a connection have no idea what to do once they're connected."
        ii) "If we can help new users better understand the internet, then we will lower rates of exploitation, fraud, and online scams."
        iii) "There are people with amazing ideas in their minds that can have a huge impact if we help them better understand how to act upon those ideas in a digital space."

15) **Digital literacy and skills training programs could be less effective if they do not integrate cultural awareness.**
    a) When discussing digital literacy and skills training, participants expressed the importance of cultural awareness. They shared how a barrier could be created if digital literacy and skills training programs are not created with cultural awareness.
    b) Illustrative/representative feedback
        i) There needs to be a "cultural lens for designing the trainings" and the use of "trusted partners with empathy, credibility, understanding, and similar demographics" when looking to grow internet access and digital literacy in areas that are highly disconnected right now.

16) **Relying solely on government agencies to deliver digital literacy and skills training programs.**
    a) When discussing digital literacy and skills training, participants discussed how government agencies cannot be the only provider of digital literacy and skills training. The expressed a need for partnerships with community-based organizations that have a better understanding of specific needs and can also be technology hubs for learning, training, skills development, triaging issues and hardware.
    b) Illustrative/representative quote
        i) "You will only get certain kinds of people who will even show up for a government training but getting a group in the community to offer it to people will get to people who would never think about coming to something put on by the government."

Appendix C: Digital equity survey data

An [archived version of the survey](#) serves as a frame of reference for the survey data below.

Respondents

Of the 2,740 overall responses, 2,712 responses were used for analysis and reporting due to those responses originating from respondents who self-identified as current Washington residents. The average respondent profile, based on the largest groupings in each demographics category, was an individual over the age of 62 who identifies as white, not Hispanic or Latino/Latina, who does not have a disability and has primary access to the internet through a cable internet connection.

The following image and table reflect the responses to survey question 9 (Where does your age fall in the age ranges listed below?). Please note that the total number of responses does not match the overall number of completed surveys due to all demographical questions being optional.
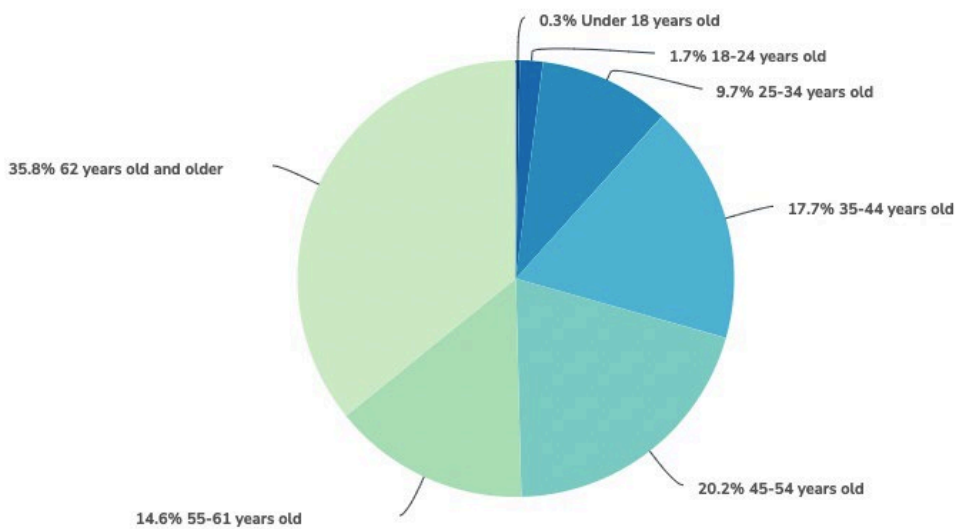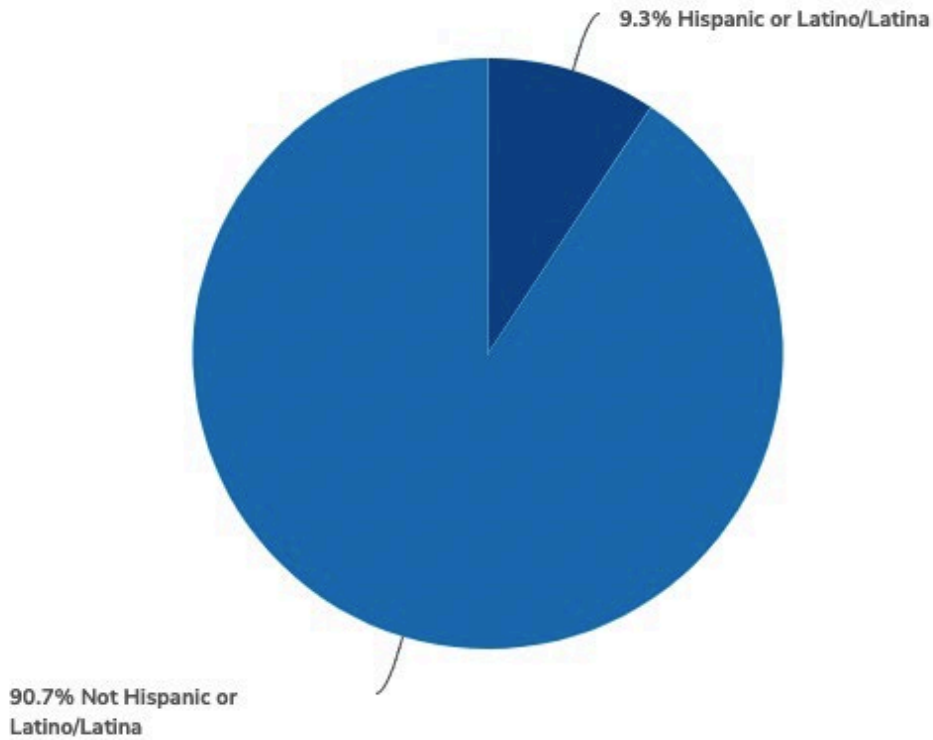

Value		Percent	Responses
Under 18 years old		0.3%	7
18-24 years old		1.7%	45
25-34 years old		9.7%	255
35-44 years old		17.7%	464
45-54 years old		20.2%	531
55-61 years old		14.6%	384
62 years old and older		35.8%	940
			Totals: 2,626

The following image and table reflect the responses to survey question 10 (What is your race?). Please note that the total number of responses does not match the overall number of completed surveys due to all demographical questions being optional.
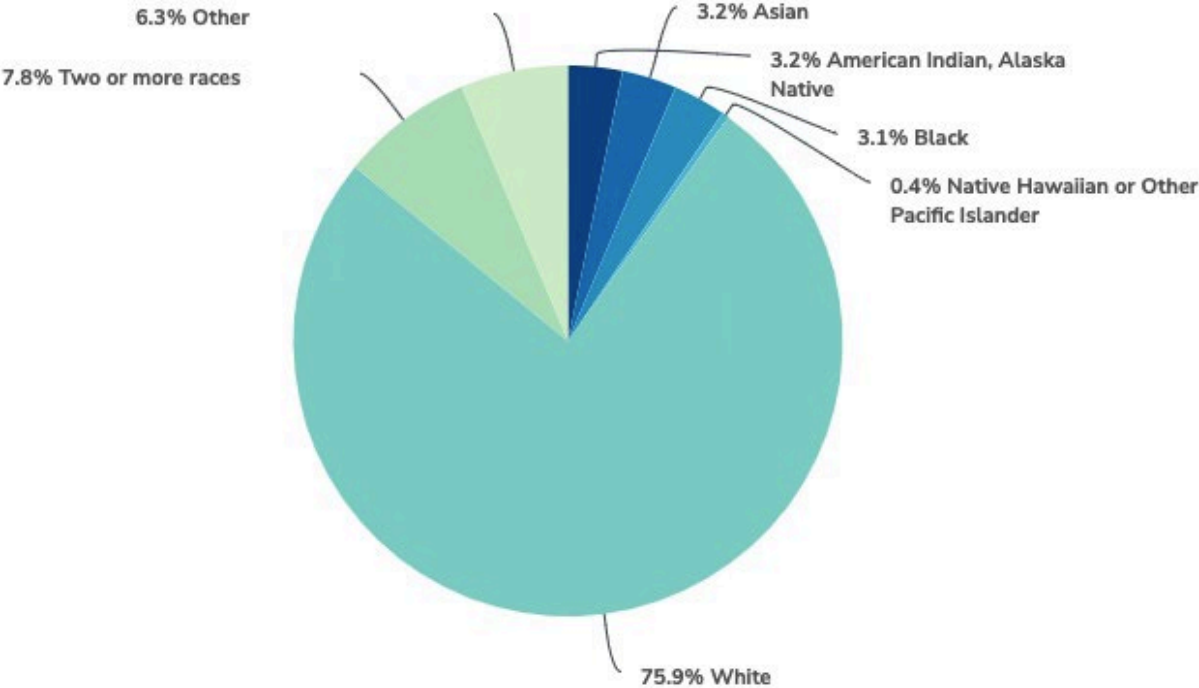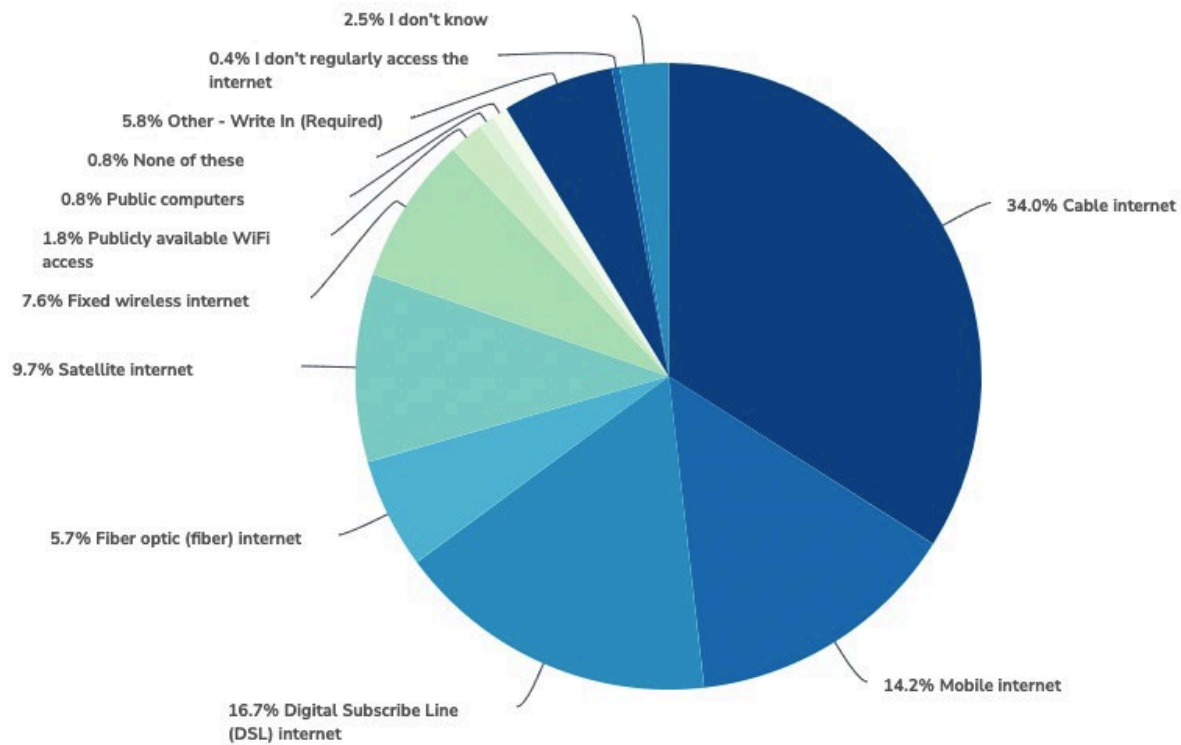

Value		Percent	Responses
American Indian, Alaska Native		3.2%	81
Asian		3.2%	83
Black		3.1%	80
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		0.4%	11
White		75.9%	1,948
Two or more races		7.8%	201
Other		6.3%	162
			Totals: 2,566

The following image and table reflect the responses to survey question 11 (What is your ethnicity?). Please note that the total number of responses does not match the overall number of completed surveys due to all demographical questions being optional.
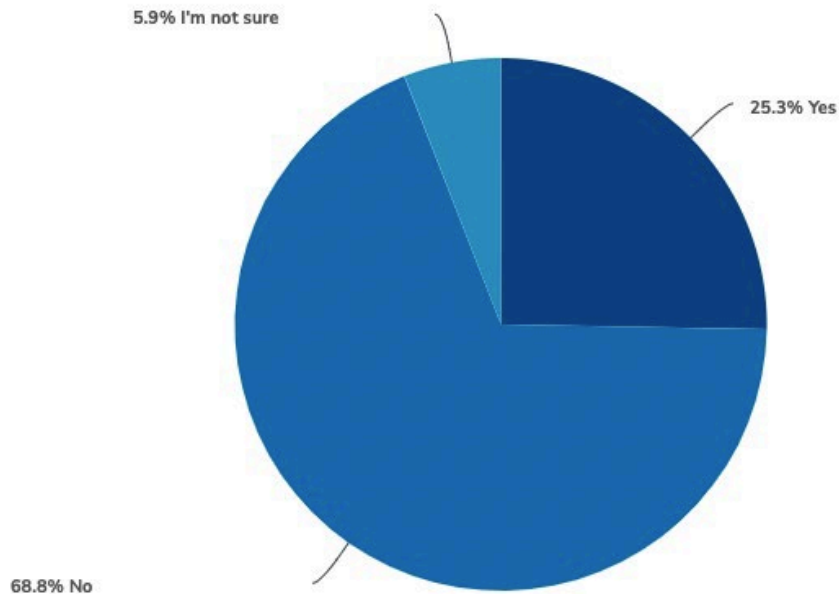

Value		Percent	Responses
Hispanic or Latino/Latina		9.3%	233
Not Hispanic or Latino/Latina		90.7%	2,282
			Totals: 2,515

The following image and table reflect the responses to survey question 13 (What is your primary way of accessing the internet?). Please note that the total number of responses does not match the overall number of completed surveys due to all demographical questions being optional.

| Value		Percent	Responses
Cable internet		34.0%	902
Mobile internet		14.2%	377
Digital Subscribe Line (DSL) internet		16.7%	442
Fiber optic (fiber) internet		5.7%	152
Satellite internet		9.7%	258
Fixed wireless internet		7.6%	202
Publicly available WiFi access		1.8%	48
Public computers		0.8%	22
None of these		0.8%	21
Other - Write In (Required) (click to view)		5.8%	153
I don't regularly access the internet		0.4%	10
I don't know		2.5%	67
			Totals: 2,654

The following image and table reflect the responses to survey question 14 (Do you have a disability of any kind?). Please note that the total number of responses does not match the overall number of completed surveys due to all demographical questions being optional.


Value		Percent	Responses
Yes		25.3%	664
No		68.8%	1,809
I'm not sure		5.9%	155
			Totals: 2,628

What we heard | Question-specific responses

Question 1: Have you experienced any barriers or challenges connecting to the internet? These might include not owning a computer or not having an internet connection.
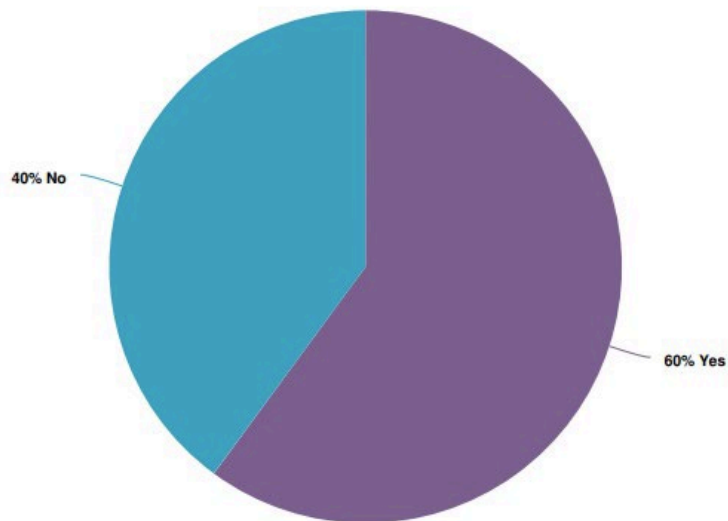
Question 2 (contingent based on response to Question 1): Since you selected "yes" for the previous question, what are the challenges you have experienced? (Choose as many as apply)
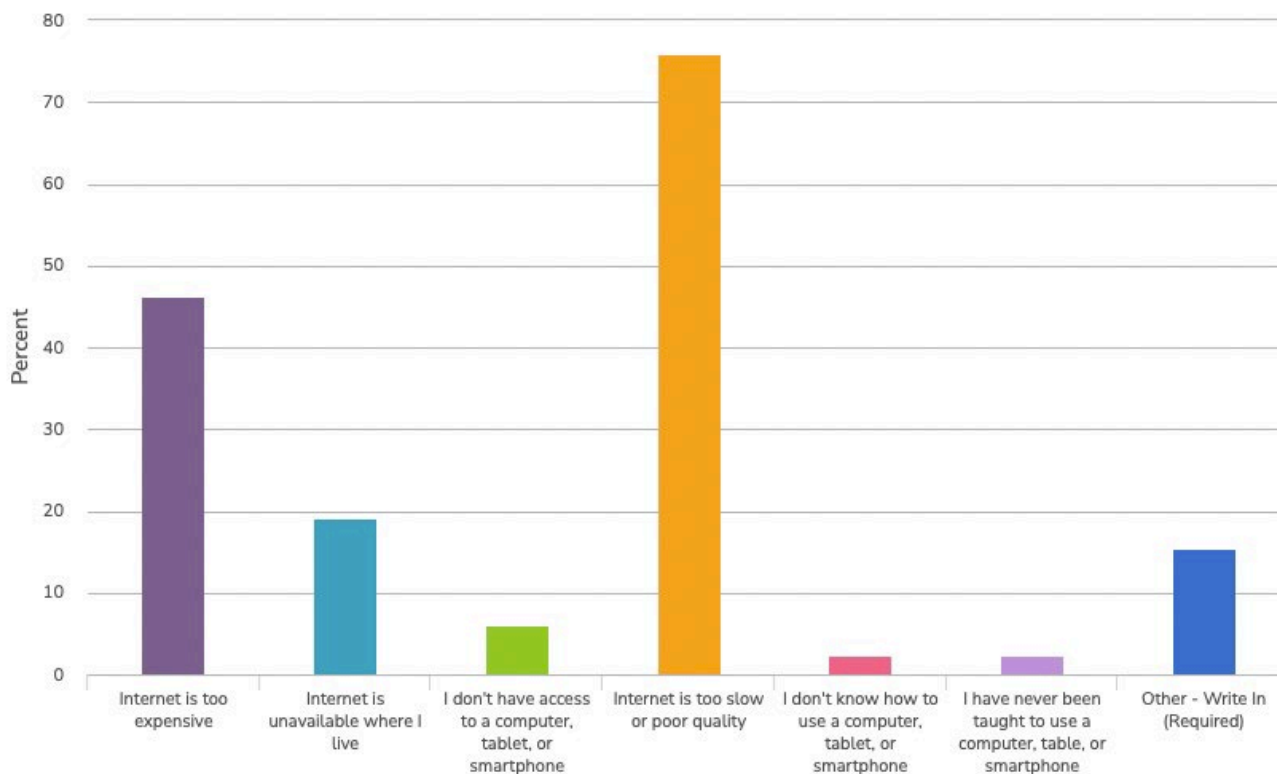
Question 3: What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life, like talking to friends, watching videos, or playing video games?

Looking across the responses to this open-ended question, six key themes emerged (listed in no particular order):
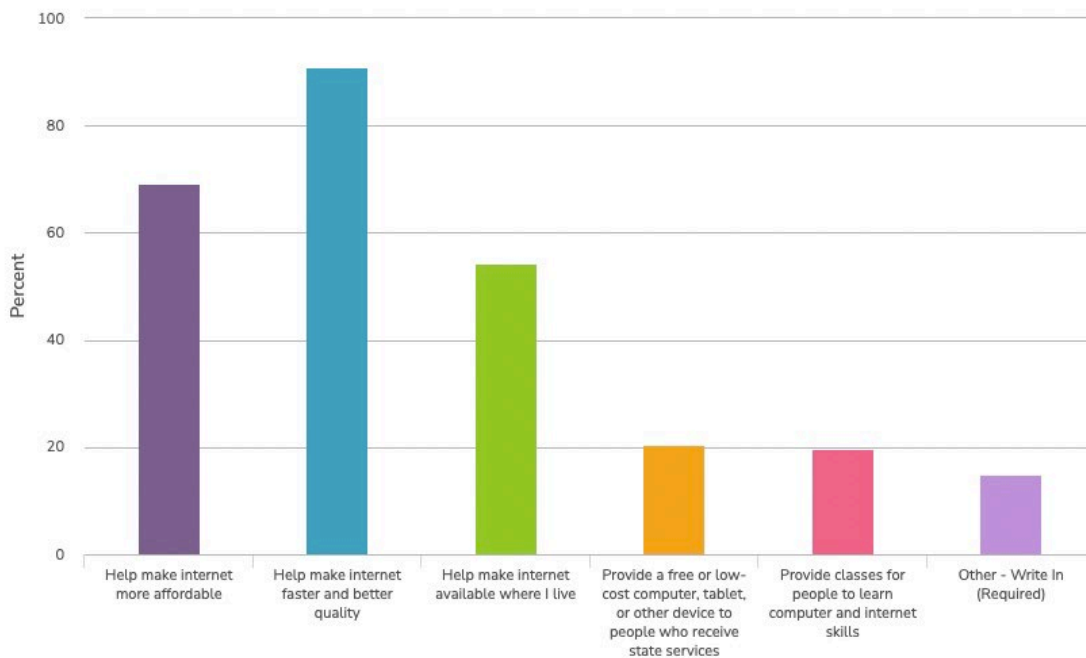
- Affordable internet service
- Fast service
- Reliable service
- Skills training
- More internet service provider options
- More affordable equipment for accessing the internet

Question 4: What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job, like accessing work files, sending emails, or completing work tasks?

Looking across the responses to this open-ended question, four key themes emerged (listed in no particular order):

- Fast service
- Reliable service
- More internet service provider options

Question 5: What can Washington state government do to help you improve your access to the internet? (Choose as many as apply)

Other notable responses to Question 5:

- Expanding who can provide access to the internet.
- More government regulation of internet service providers.
- Government subsidies for internet access costs, up to and including free internet for certain groups.

Question 8: Do you have anything else that you would like to say to help us make accessing the internet better for all people in Washington?

Looking across the responses to this open-ended question, four key themes emerged (listed in no particular order):

- Appreciation and hopefulness for the efforts to address internet connectivity challenges in Washington.
- The importance of education and training in addressing internet connectivity challenges.
- An excitement for new technologies that can possibly help with addressing internet connectivity challenges.
- The importance of recognizing rural-urban differences in Washington.

As a frame of reference, 935 survey respondents (34.5%) submitted ZIP codes from counties with a population of fewer than 100 persons per square mile or counties smaller than 225 square miles as of April 1, 2022. Those county characteristics are what the [Washington Office of Financial Management uses](#) to determine counties where individuals and organizations are eligible for rural area assistance programs.

Appendix D: Focus group summary

Methods, approach, and findings for each focus group

Focus group initiation and participation
Four focus groups listened to stakeholders with lived experience to better understand perceived barriers to digital connectivity. The focus groups created an opportunity for rural communities, non-native English speakers, and individuals to share their lived experience with digital inequity with the Office of Equity and the Washington State Broadband Office. Across the four groups and with support from Goodwill and the Equity in Education Coalition of Washington, barriers and recommendations from community members were shared in Tacoma, Pasco, Seattle and Ephrata.

Focus group design
Several considerations made during the focus groups' design phase increase the likelihood that community members felt safe sharing their experiences and that barriers to participation had been reduced or eliminated. To accomplish these goals, all groups were co-facilitated with trusted community partners; community members received a living wage stipend for their participation; child care and food were provided; and in some cases, take-home COVID tests were distributed with meeting materials.

During the focus groups, community members engaged with the four main questions raised during Digital Equity Forum listening sessions:

1) Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

2) What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

3) What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job?

4) What can Washington state government do to help you improve your access to the internet?

Since these focus groups were in person, community members shared their answers to the questions, grouped their responses, and developed major themes that emerged from their group. The overall themes identified below are stated in the participant's own words.

Summary of themes

August 8, 2022, Tacoma: Goodwill Focus Group
Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

- Outages
- Language barrier
- Dead zones
- Internet companies taking advantage
- Low/no reach in rural areas
- FAQs and tech support

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

- Wifi anywhere
- New devices
- Cheaper repair
- New equipment
- Family plans
- More durable devices
- Connecting with others
- School, dating, teachers, news, doctors, job applications

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job?

- GPS
- Hands free devices
- More charging ports (stations) need to work
- Internet access
- Software access: Microsoft Office

What can Washington state government do to help you improve your access to the internet?

- Make it free!
- Focus on rural communities
- Make equipment investments in rural areas, such as 5G
- More devices/quality/affordable equipment
- More towers = no dead zones
- Address quality
- Classes/focus on simple language
- Subsidies for businesses/others
- Refurbish equipment

August 20, 2022, Ephrata: Equity in Education Coalition of Washington Focus Group
Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

- The internet is not strong enough and fails frequently.
- A lot of folks still do not have internet in their homes, but if they do, they get bad signal.
- Internet does not get to rural areas.
- The wind creates instability in having a good internet connection.

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

- I need a better antenna to get reliable internet.
- Better services that can be reliable.
- To get better experience in learning how to navigate the internet.
- Have access to a better phone or computer, and to actually get connected to internet.
- Need to get more practice with technology.
- To get internet access in all areas.

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job?

- Need to have access to a hotspot to have internet in rural areas.
- I want to learn more.
- Have adequate technology in the work to be able to do it, and also have better internet.
- Learn to use a computer.
- 1st I need to actually have internet 2nd a phone or a computer.
- Have the necessary equipment.

What can Washington state government do to help you improve your access to the internet?

- The Government should not leave the agricultural communities out of internet services. Especially folks that live outside of the big cities.
- To allocate more antennas for free internet or at least at low cost.
- Help put a tower close to community to have internet access.
- More support to community-based organizations.
- Give more funds to create more programs to help a youth and families in need with internet and navigation assistance.
- Subsidize or guarantee free internet for homes with good internet connection.
- Support the community and listen to them.

August 25, 2022, Seattle: Goodwill Focus Group
Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

- Connection speed
- Spam and scams/need cybersecurity
- Language access
- Storms and outages
- Lost phone, need safe place to connect without phones
- Personal use of internet

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

- Updated hardware
- Address proprietary equipment
- Hardware
- Programs for low-income folks
- Higher speeds and stability

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job?

- Focus on data
- Tools: hardware
- Education, digital literacy
- Focus on internet for news/safety
- This is a basic need, referring to internet access
- More fiber lines and equitable speed

What can Washington state government do to help you improve your access to the internet?

- Lower cost
- Right size solutions for community partners and organizations
- Outreach: resources and where to find them
- Better planning/risk management
- Use trusted advocates
- Language accessibility
- Training

September 21, 2022, Pasco: Goodwill Focus Group
Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

- Cost
- Safety/online
- Access to wifi
- Outages
- Not familiar with how to use the internet
- Poor connection in parts of the state
- Language
- Equipment

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

- Connecting with family
- Paying bills
- Finding work
- GPS - getting around - travel
- Dating
- Telehealth
- School communications
- Grades
- Announcements
- Need a phone and phone number
- Cell phone

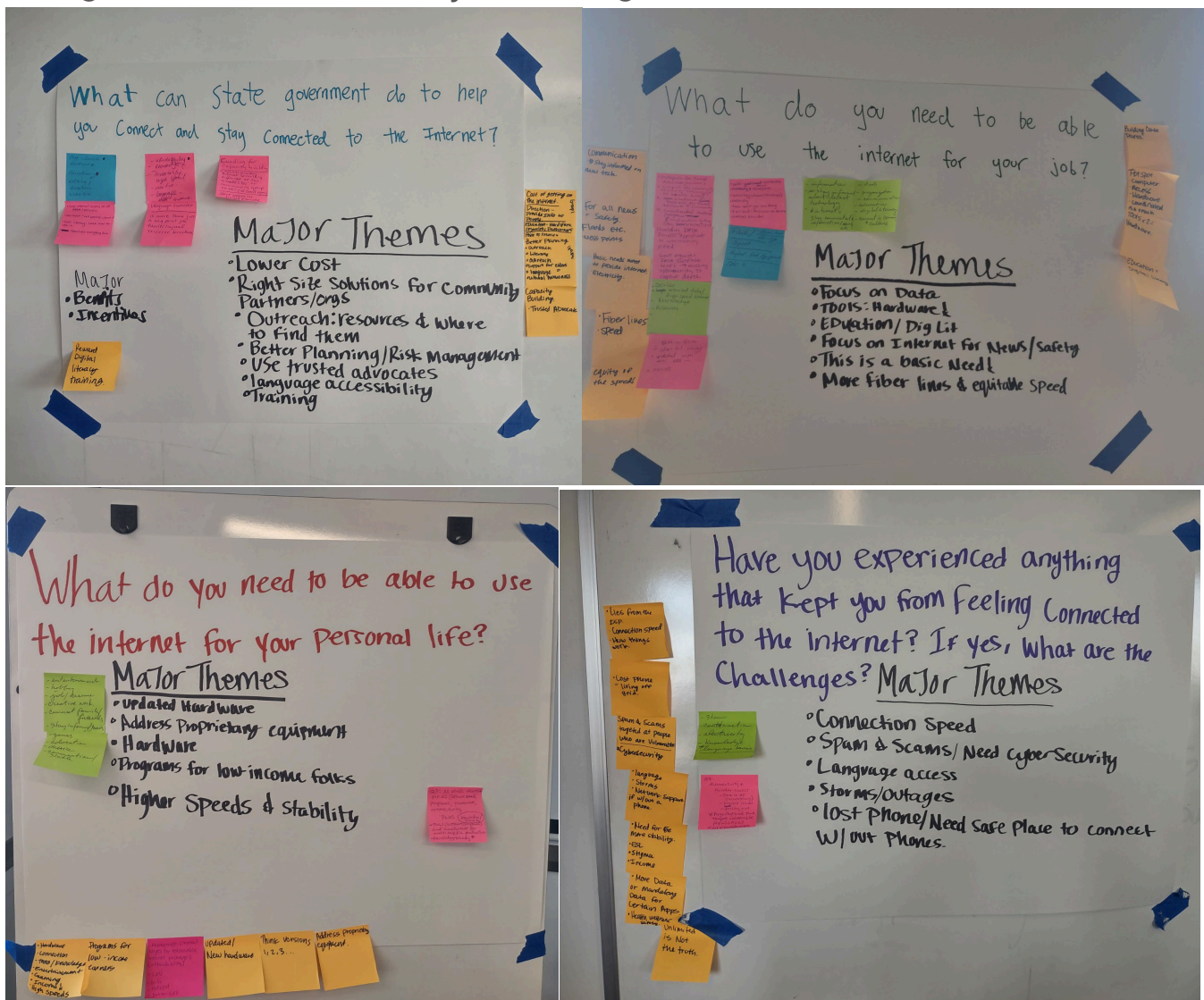What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job?

- Training
- Email and communication
- Wifi
- Having a job
- Good internet and computer
- VPN
- Subscriptions
- Good equipment

- Production: Work that requires connecting to the internet related to production

What can Washington state government do to help you improve your access to the internet?

- Free communications about resources
- One place where people can go for support
- Program for low income earners
- Make wifi networks stronger
- Expand spectrum services - free of charge
- App for all Washingtonians to get information
- Literacy courses
- Work with private companies on price/quality
- Classes for all education levels/ adults without education/ in native language

Images from community listening sessions

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your Job?

Themes
- GPS
- Hands free devices
- More charging Ports (stations) *Need to work!*
- Internet access
- Software access: Microsoft Office

(sticky notes: Better Connections, Faster/Speed, Laptops, Software, More Charging Ports (Portable and other), Laptop, Internet Access, Education for "word", excel, word etc. ; G.P.S, Tutorials, Navigation)

Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? What are the Challenges?

Themes
- Outages
- Language Barrier
- Dead Zones
- Internet companies taking advantage
- Low/no reach in rural areas
- FAQ's and Tech Support

What Can State government do to help You Connect and Stay Connected to the Internet?

Themes
- Make it Free!
- Focus on rural communities
- Make equipment investments in rural areas, Example - 5G
- More devices/Quality/Affordable equipment
- More towers = No dead zones
- Address Quality
- Classes/Focus on Simple language
- Subsidies for businesses/Others
- Refurbish equipment

(sticky notes: Make IT FREE, WiFi, Classes to Teach how to use new Devices, Provide more Devices, Make more Affordable, Spreading Info to More People, TV Channels Available with Internet!)

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your Personal life?

Themes
- Wifi Anywhere
- New devices
- Cheaper repair
- New equipment
- Family Plans
- More Durable devices
- Connecting w/ Others:
  - Schools
  - Teachers
  - Doctors
  - dating
  - News
  - Job applications

(sticky notes: Email, Bill Pay, Desktop use, Study, School (college), Phone & Charger, Appointments, Music, Look up things I Don't Know, Access to Internet, Wifi anywhere, New Devices, New Laptop, New Phone, New Tablet, Cheaper Repair Places, G.P.S, Navigation, Tutorials)

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life? Themes

- Connecting with family
- Paying Bills
- Finding Work
- GPS - getting around - Travel
- dating
- Telehealth
- School Communications
  - Grades
  - Announcements
- Need a phone & phone #
- Cell phone

¿Qué es lo que necesitas para ser capaz de utilizar el internet para tu vida personal?

Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges? Themes

- Cost
- Access to Wifi
- Outages
- Not familiar with how to use the internet
- Poor connection in parts of the State
- Language
- Equipment
- Safety/online

¿Has experimentado algo que te impide sentirte conectado con el internet? En caso de contestar positivamente, ¿cuáles son esos retos?

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job? Themes

- Training
- Wifi
- having a Job
- Good internet & Computer
- VPN
- Subscriptions
- Good equipment
- Production
- email & communication

¿Qué es lo que necesitas para ser capaz de utilizar el internet para tu trabajo?

What can state government do to help you connect and stay connected to the internet? Themes

- Free communications about resources
- One place where people can go for support.
- Program for low-income earners
- Make wifi Networks Stronger
- Expand Spectrum Services - Free of Charge
- APP for all Washingtonians to get information
- Literacy Courses
- Work with Private companies on Price/Quality
- Classes for all education levels / Adults without education / in native language

¿Qué puede hacer el gobierno del estado para ayudar conectarte y mantener y mantenerte conectado al internet?

Appendix E: Comprehensive public comment log

Digital Equity Forum public comments (meeting #1 - Dec. 9, 2021)

Chat Log for 12/09/2021 Digital Equity Forum At-large meeting

00:40:01   Carolyn Cole (she/her) DSHS:does NDIA recommend a particular self-evaluation tool?

00:43:57   Kris K: Thank you Ms. Jester. Does NDIA believe it is possible for a community to have full economic and democratic participation in critical infrastructure that they do not own and control, and why?

00:46:04   Jennie Dickinson: PLEASE NOTE: The FCC maps are really wrong, but the WA State broadband map is not always accurate, either. Be careful. Believe the individual and what they say about their actual experience.

00:57:43   Lloyd Levine: T-Mobile is committed to closing the digital divide in both rural and urban communities. Prior to our merger 20 months ago, we had the commitment but not the capabilities. Post merger we have both the commitment to helping be part of the solution and the capabilities to do that. We have already met with Ernie and Dr. Ja about how we can help.

00:58:40   Tadeo Saenz: In my community, the main private-sector ISP sees Digital Equity efforts as a threat to his profit margin. How are you addressing this elsewhere?

01:03:43   Lloyd Levine: All, in a perfect example of why broadband is necessary and how those without it can suffer. I am about to leave the conference to do a parent teacher conference with my daughter's teacher. I will be back when I am off. Prior to the pandemic this would have necessitated me driving to the school. Now I simply do a video conference.

01:25:51   Carolyn Cole (she/her) DSHS:thank you, happy to provide more information about accessible meeting planning

01:28:11   Joseph Medeiros: My ISP refuses to provide high speed internet/broadband to our area. Change the law and make these companies a utilty so we all get equal treatment

01:57:06   Jennie Dickinson: While the information you have shared today has value to me, and I appreciate it and will utilize what I can, I'm afraid that my rural eastern Washington community is unlikely to embrace any attempts at digital inclusion work using this style of communication and even word usage. Are there efforts being made to find a method that might work in the most politically conservative portions of the state? It would be extremely valuable to me if there were. Thank you for consider that.

01:59:25   Kris K: Everyone has been harmed by Telco strangulation of a utility. Over $400b of tax payer money has been given to telecoms to build fiber. They haven't delivered.

02:05:44   Sabrina Roach (she/her), Inclusive Data/Black BrillianceResearch: This Friday, 12/10 at 2pm there's a WA Digital Equity Act Draft feedback meeting with Rep Gregerson and House staff.

Email correspondence

From: Merribeth Greenberg <merribeth.manning@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 6, 2022 11:26 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Digital Equality Listening Session

Good Morning,

I would be interested in the March 29th or May 10 session.

I am legally blind and my husband is also disabled. We both receive disability from SSA. I also have a job.

Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

The cost for the internet, even just for our phones to be connected to, is expensive. There are some applications that you can't do on your phone or the data use is too expensive also.

I mostly use my phone at home to access the internet. My stepdad gave me his old laptop, but it can be cumbersome to use. Luckly for me I use the Windows Magnifier on it. to read the screen like i do at work on the desktop.

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

to use the internet or wifi on your phone you have to rent a modem from the carrier such as Xfinity or Centery Link. We use Xfinity. We use a lot of GB a month. We wind up spending $106 a month just for internet. Which is more expensive then we pay for our phone use of $94 a month. But this day in age these are esenstals such as Water and electricity.

What do you need to be able to use the internet for your work or job?

I work at a hotel and don't work remotely. I do a lot of things at work instead of at home that I probably should do from home.

My husband who is disabled sometimes uses the laptop to do things he can't do on his phone. But he is not very tech savvy and has trouble with both his phone and the laptop. My husband needs access to classes for those 50+ to learn how to use a smartphone, a laptop, and the internet/wifi.

What could state government do to help support your needs for using the internet?

It would be great to have a program for those that are low income and a program for those that are in the area just above the poverty level. For those just above the poverty level, to add assistance to pay for internet not to pay for it.

Thank you for listening.

Have a great week.

Beth Greenberg

merribethgreenberg@gmail.com

3607137701

Vancouver WA 98660

From: Kerri <kerridecantero@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 15, 2022 12:54 PM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Listening sessions registration

Hello,

I am very interested in signing up for these. I don't know if you are aware of what local Pierce County company, Rainier Connect (running publicly owned Click!) is doing. Here is a recent article that explains some of it and I am happy to expand further from a consumer perspective. There was supposed to be a joint Council/public utilities study session today but it was cancelled, as well as tonight's City Council meeting. Many do not have a choice in providers. Cost has already doubled the past few years. They refuse to sign up for ACP/EBB. They do not advertise discounted Lifeline program(s) and it is throttled at the lowest level of service. They will not accept attempted contacts to management but gatekeep through Frontline customer service. The customer service receives many complaints. They are heavily involved with Chamber of Commerce "good ol boys" network so people are afraid to stand up to them. Maybe you won't be?

https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article259236685.html

Here is the story sans paywall:

https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/rainier-connect-making-major-changes-click-cable-tv-service-some-folks-are-unhappy/4CGWZ7PVIJFT5INLMNAXHZPGIA/

From: Bruce Runyard <bruce.runyard@outlook.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 15, 2022 1:58 PM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Cc: Bruce Runyard <bruce.runyard@outlook.com>
Subject: Comment to Digital Equity Forum

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the discussion of broadband access, affordability, and digital literacy by way of the Digital Equity Forum.

In the E. Washington communities of Winthrop, Mazama, Twisp, and Carlton we live in an undisputed underserved broadband environment.

Years of "studies" by the local PUD, consultants hired by the town mayors, and other entities have resulted in "analysis paralysis" with complete absence of a plan forward for broadband expansion. Over the last 10 years despite the billions of dollars made available through the FCC's Connect America Fund (CAF) using federal tax dollars, the ISPs in this region have applied for and are granted monies that they use for infrastructure improvements using a low-hanging-fruit approach. In other words instead of investing tax dollar funds into truly underserved rural communities for which CAF was intended, these communication giants target the higher population density communities that favor their profit margins and receive faster payback from their CAF funded broadband improvement work. As a result, the rural communities with less population remain underserved.

And we cannot all afford to upgrade our internet connection to the SpaceX (Elon Musk) StarLink system at a $500 initial equipment investment, then $100 monthly. More to the point, all of the local ISPs in this area - CenturyLink, NCI-Datacom, Methownet.com, HughesNet.com, and others have chosen not to participate in broadband expansion for this simple reason – while they may get free $s to construct the initial broadband expansion, they cannot justify the out-years cost of Operations & Maintenance (O&M) for the long term. In fact most of these ISPs are in "exhaust status" now whereby no new internet connection requests are permitted because their aging internet switching equipment has been over capacity for years with no plans to upgrade the aging technology.

Simply stated, implementing broadband improvements into our underserved communities is not in our ISP's financial interests. Until you find a way of addressing that problem we will remain underserved and confined to internet speeds of less than 1.0Mbps that are too often subject to frequent interruptions due to ISPs that have no intentions of investing in technology upgrades.

Respectfully,

Bruce Runyard

Winthrop, WA

509-996-2734

From: Phoenix Strategies <phoenixstrategies@outlook.com>

> Sent: Tuesday, March 15, 2022 9:46 PM

> To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>

> Subject: Rsvp listening session

>

>

> Hi. I'd like to register for the March 30 noon to 1:30 session. Also suggest you offer some options for non work or commute hours.

>

> Thank you.

>

> Charlie Phoenix

Is the info shared during listening sessions treated as confidential info, including participants names and other personal identifiable information or is all the info incl participants part of public records?

From: James Parker <toasterowner@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 27, 2022 10:30 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: I am underserved by internet providers.

External Email

My address is 17921 127th Ave NE, Arlington WA 98223. There are about 125 other homes similarly situated in the area.

ZIPLY Fiber is the local internet service provider. There are no other providers (cable, wireless, etc) save satellite, which is prohibitively expensive.

The maximum speed ZIPLY claims to be provided is 1 MBPS. What is provided is between 100Kbps and 20kbps depending on the time of day.

My address is just outside of the area that Arlington is upgrading and ZIPLY Fiber has no plans to upgrade the service.

What can be done to bring 21st century for internet service to this geographic location?

Thank you,

James Parker

From: Allison Moses <allimoses@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 1, 2022 8:23 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Community Listening Session

Hello,

I was wondering if there was a transcript of the listening session on March 30th that I could print out? I was unable to attend but feel very strongly about digital equity. I am grossly under-served and want to SHOUT with a loud voice to whoever is looking into this problem. I live at 23018 NE 83rd ST. in Vancouver and am part of unincorporated Clark County. I have tried and tried to get a better internet connection in order to be more successful in my work and school. I work from home and attend University Classes online.

This past year it has become almost impossible to do either. Currently my upload speed is .3 Mbps and my download speed is 3.7Mbps. The only option I have for the internet is Qwest and I have the fastest internet package possible. I have changed my router and modem several times, installed multiple Orbi Satellite boxes in my home and nothing helps. Comcast serves my neighbors with high speed and business internet less than .5miles away. I have called Comcast and offered to pay out of pocket for them to bring the line up my street and they won't do it. Why?? Why are my neighbors and I being frozen out like this? There seem to be no answers and I am getting fed up!

Something needs to be done immediately to fix this problem. I am very concerned that if COVID-19 or something like that should make it necessary to stay home, I will not be able to work or go to school. I now have to go to my husband's office to take tests, turn in large assignments or attend zoom meetings for work or school.

What more can I do to make sure this issue gets the attention it should? I have called Representative Jaime H. Beutler and I spoke with her assistant Colin Swanson on the telephone and shared my concerns. Is there anything else I can do to facilitate getting the services to my home that I need?

Thank you for your attention,

Allison Moses

23018 NE 83rd ST. Vancouver, WA 98682

Digital Equity Forum public comment (meeting #2 - April 7, 2022)

Chat Log for 04/07/2022 Digital Equity Forum At-large meeting

00:58:19   Stanislav Fritz:I understand the current authority with PUD and have talked to PUD. Also worked with Twip Works on their broadband initiative.

00:58:39   Stanislav Fritz:Twisp Works (sorry for the Typo)

01:01:27   Stanislav Fritz:I don't want to hog the time, so just in Chat, I'll note that many in the Okanogan area think that Starlink is the panacea. It is not and I could go into all the reasons why not offline.

01:02:36   Stanislav Fritz:I vehemently agree with the comment on the bad maps! And it takes years to correct those maps, or the maps show "potential" access.

01:04:25   Stanislav Fritz:I would also note that some of the ISPs/providers consider 10mbps broadband. IT is not.

01:06:43   Stanislav Fritz:The current commenter is in the same area as I am :-). Sounds as if he is using SATELLITE (Hughesnet and ViaSat) and you could hear the issue there as that is considered broadband. 500 ms or 1000ms delays should NOT be considered broadband!

01:07:45   Stanislav Fritz:and COOP's are a bit different.

01:08:19   Bruce: No, not satellite. Been confined for 10 years now with 1.5Mb DSL that is usually only about 0.5 to 0.8 Mb/sec. Thank you. Methow Valley.

01:09:26   Bruce: No, it was Centurylink DSL 1.5Mb/sec. Methow Valley, Winthrop.

01:12:49   Stanislav Fritz:Bruce. Even worse ! :-). Their 1.5 mb/sec almost never reaches that and yes, their circuits are so exhausted that often it is worse than that. 1.5 is NOT broadband and copper wires cannot go to broadband.

01:21:49   Stanislav Fritz:As an FYI to those who think the PUD bill made it easy. Much of the rural area is served by coops. Additionally, the bill makes it POSSIBLE for PUDs to enter into retail, but puts enough barriers and research that they have to provide, that it will be a long time before a PUD wants to do so. I have HB 1336 in front of me now.

01:22:05   Bruce: No matter how much money or degree of executive discussions you throw at implementing broadband to underserved communities, there needs to be accountability of taxpayer resources spent. No greater example of failure of broadband implementation is the FCC's CAF I and CAF II programs that have put billions of dollars into so-called underserved communities. The telecommunication companies taking these funds have applied them not to rural communities, rather they've done broadband work in higher density populated communities that better serve their out-year profits. Until you fix that problem with accountability, we will remain underserved in our rural communities.

01:33:08   Stanislav Fritz:Yes, CAF II did not do a great job of filtering who they gave money to. Starlink got a $900 million grant. Yet, their model is sell to anyone and they had that model with, or without, the grant. Now, I use Starlink, but it is not a panacea, nor solves the problem.

01:34:02   Stanislav Fritz:We also have not discussed metering. A couple of gigbytes of data is NOTHING anymore.

01:37:38   Stanislav Fritz:I would add a nuance to Needs: the internet connect needs to be of the type and quality that it works with VPNs. MOST major companies need a VPN for their employee. Without going into the technical issues, even a 20mbps connection can have problems with VPNs.

01:40:09   Brian Anderson: For employment opportunities, along with having internet access, there is the need for training in technology literacy.

01:47:09   Stanislav Fritz:U.S. Ranks 28th in price for internet (with the average price being $62, but the rural internet is more like $100).

If the U.S. were in Europe, it would be the MOST expensive country.

U.S. internet speeds are among the worst of OECD countries.

Canada ranks amongst the best, so its not just being large and rural.

01:48:18   Bruce: Sounds like my prior "hand raised" verbal comment was compromised by our slow internet connection. So here it is in writing - In the E. Washington communities of Winthrop, Mazama, Twisp, and Carlton we live in an undisputed underserved broadband environment. Previous taxpayer funded broadband programs, instead of investing our dollars into truly underserved rural communities these communication giants target the higher population density communities that favor their profit margins. All of the local ISPs in this area - CenturyLink, NCI-Datacom, Methownet.com, HughesNet.com, and others have chosen not to participate in broadband expansion for this simple reason – while they may get free $s to construct the initial broadband expansion, they cannot justify the out-years cost of Operations & Maintenance (O&M) for the long term. Simply stated, implementing broadband improvements into our underserved communities is not in our ISP's financial interests.

01:51:06   Chris.Ganoung: Additionally, with the Cloud based services that ALL software, security, carrier, gaming and government applications/websites are now utilizing to have better storage options, anyone in less than urban environments are suffering. UPLOAD Speeds must be better. Take for example the Work From Home person who has to have the Laptop sync with a corporate DropBox or OneDrive type of service. That is a pain point that anyone with low upload bandwidth can take a full day or in most cases must drive to a location or coffee shop to complete because it is easier. Rural and even some suburban areas are still in the dark ages where I had better upload speeds and serviceability in 2006 than I have now in 2022 due to the type of utilization. I have been designing carrier and municipal networks for 25 years.

01:53:15   Bruce: StarLink has solved the problem here of low horizon satellites blocking access, blocked access to other ISP's local dishes due to topography, and lack of fiber. Copper phone lines can due much better than 1.5Mbps but it requires ISPs to invest in current switching technology. But they will not do so because it doesn't meet their business case requirements. That's what CAF was supposed to address and it failed to do so. Let's not repeat that failure with new infrastructure funding.

01:54:23   Stanislav Fritz:Agree, Bruce. Caveats. HughesNet could not get CAF II funding as their lag time is above 100ms. OCEC (coop) is working exclusively with MethowNet, but only in "research" of feasibility. As a Coop and small they don't want to deal with it. If OCEC were part of PUD and PUD were MANDATED to provide Internet, the way rural electrification and phones were, it would make financial sense with the bigger group swallowing some of the costs. We can't say that method doesn't work, it did for landline phones and electricity.

01:56:46   Mario Bañuelos: can we include a statement on social equity here, lens on equity

01:57:24   Stanislav Fritz:Consensus usually means "General agreement" not "everyone agrees" … it is slow, but I agree it can help with buy in.

01:59:05   Bruce: Yes, I've spoken with the Coop GM within the last 2 weeks. Even if the Coop Board were to approve the initiative, we are still in excess of 3 years out from getting fiber installed.

02:11:16   Brian Anderson: And the knowledge of how to use the device or software

02:13:41   Mario Bañuelos: Not sure if it makes sense to add after essential services, " Self Expression and belonging."

02:20:32   Sabrina Roach: Page 12 of E2SHB 1723

02:22:19   Stanislav Fritz:To follow on to Bre's comment. Can this group somehow be leveraged for local communities to come up with local solutions but ask someone for HELP on that? I hate to say it, but with one of my masters degrees being in Public Policy the length of time for legislature to get something done is often slow. We may go "far" to play with that proverb, but I may be dead by the time we get there. There may be some local solutions that leverage some knowledge that this Digital Equity Forum has. It would be nice to be able to tap into that WHILE we go together somewhere.

02:31:07   Stanislav Fritz:Well... my, albeit out of date, schooling from the Evans school was ACTIONABLE policy recommendations, with 3 options, that are actionable, doable, relevant...if the purpose is to help the legislature do something. Legislature funds and PASSES laws (such as the PUD one mentioned).

02:31:50   Bruce: Strongly agree with the suggestion by Stanislav Fritz regarding influencing/encouraging local communities to brainstorm "local solutions". This is especially important where we have unserved & underserved rural communities with a level of "little to none" presence of any major telecommunication carrier whereby the smaller telecommunication providers have no incentive to take the financial risk to expand services.

02:33:37   Stanislav Fritz:Define community? Seems like you weakened the ALL residents

02:34:14   Mario Bañuelos: Does the definition of community mean geographic and demographic? will that be inclusive of people that are NOT in community.

02:34:15   Mario Bañuelos: yeap

02:36:01   Stanislav Fritz:I like a DATE. Do we have a unified understanding of "equitable" … I could say everyone with $5000 has an equal access to something.

02:36:19   Mario Bañuelos: does access to broadband internet "technology" include access to tablets, phones, kiosks? or is that confusing?

02:37:08   Stanislav Fritz:There is a definition of "broadband" that is accepted by the U.N. and the U.S.

02:40:37   Chris.Ganoung: Many Carriers fiber is a few thousand feet away from my house. It is only to serve Cell towers on the other side of the mountain. Does not give me access to anything.

02:41:10   Stanislav Fritz:The phrase "broadband internet technology" is actually worse, in my mind, then access to broadband internet.

02:42:23   Mario Bañuelos: the word "residents" may be exclusive to populations within WA that do not have legal status.

02:43:13   Stanislav Fritz:Note that the U.N. and European union def of Broadband is going up to 100mbps soon.

02:44:33   Stanislav Fritz:I would also like policy to include SUSTAINABILITY. I think some of the crap DSL lines here are part of early initiatives, but now DSL is far behind Broadband.

02:45:53   Mario Bañuelos: All Washingtonians, all who live in WA state, all who call WA their home. etc.

02:46:48   Stanislav Fritz:Equity includes that all of what was stated and the ability to MAINTAIN that equity. Notoriously underserved communities get something and then are ignored until infrastructure rots away again.

02:48:46   Mario Bañuelos: Ensuring that decisions that affect infrastructure does not harm the land we stand on and honors and respects the rights of indigenous groups and values. (for values)

02:50:13   Mario Bañuelos: People before profit. Continuos improvement. and seeking of feedback?

02:50:45   Chris.Ganoung: I would like to add under address - "access to affordable," should be reworded to "User" as that does not imply any criteria other than a user of the services we intend to offer.

02:51:04   Chris.Ganoung: "user access to"

02:51:24   Keitha Bryson:Educating all communities to broadband/internet trained. Each-one-teach-one. Start a high school and/or college technology requirement that puts credit hours out in the communities who need that training. Students often make great teachers.

02:53:09   Stanislav Fritz:Value: acknowledging past ignoring of various groups and areas (rural in general) areas the most behind should be prioritized the most, and I suspect the middle will get pulled along. I guess the key is the Last in queue right now should not remain last in queue

02:57:27   Chris.Ganoung: Completely Agree with Kietha!

03:02:43   Keitha Bryson:Please add education to this category as well.

03:03:44   Keitha Bryson: Education by students for members of their own communities.

03:08:30   Mario Bañuelos: Can we add an alternative method of communication that supplements broadband communication in terms of emergencies, whether cyber attacks, shutdowns, world events, etc. how do we cover our basis. Apologies for the thought.

03:14:40   Mario Bañuelos: is it within scope to take the forum to current communities wherein access is currently an issue, those that may not have participated since no stable internet or lacking, to gather thoughts of those affected, and things we have not thought of (seeking diverse perspectives0 maybe an physical forum or caravan in rural communities, (just at thought).

Email correspondence

From: stanislav.fritz@gmail.com <stanislav.fritz@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 8, 2022 10:49 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Here is a "funny" example of the fun stuff in Washington state for rural internet.

Comcast tries to charge $19,000 (yes, really) to install internet. His neighbor already had it.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2022/04/comcast-wanted-man-to-pay-19000-even-though-his-neighbor-already-had-service/

From: laura bagnall <lbagnall@hotmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 9, 2022 8:05 PM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Digital Equality can be a matter of degree

Hello,

I was able to participate during the first zoom call but left that call feeling very unsatisfied with my responses to your questions. I felt whiny.

I have internet, many have nothing. It took me a while to figure out what the problem was and this is what I think.

The issue of internet service can be a 'matter of degree' ....to what degree do you have internet service

I have internet service which certainly puts me ahead of those people who have none - but

...We have only 1 choice; Consolidated Communications.

...Our service is slow and many applications do not work on it ....and there are no upgrade options

... Our DSL lines are maxed out at 15 mbps download and 1 mbps upload....and those cost extra

...the standard is 5 mbps download and 1 mbps upload

so yes:

...we do have EMail

...and some streaming options - but the streaming bogs down and stops and starts and skips

but

...We can't have multiple devices attached - so doing school from home, or any kind of educational classes (more than 1 child, online college courses) is pretty limited

...Due to the speed limitations.....work from home is not an option

My concern with this is…. we'll be over looked because yes, we do have internet

There are other issues and I'm having a hard time explaining the specifics. Nevertheless, I hope you are able to understand what I'm trying to convey when I say 'a matter of degree' with regards to internet service. It certainly isn't equal or sufficient in today's world

Thank you,

Laura Bagnall
34611 30th Ave S
Roy WA 98580

From: stanislav.fritz@gmail.com <stanislav.fritz@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 12, 2022 6:08 PM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: For your continued collection of comments.

I think many in the rural areas are both skeptical and see their skepticism rewarded.

For example in the last meeting/forum I raised the PUD and fiber. I would note that in in PUD's recent newsletter, Broadband seeking grants "…Although the grants emphasize rural recipients, very rural areas like Okanogan are often overlooked…" The PUD notes they applied for (among others): Washington State Broadband Office grant for $9.6 million for Twisp, Pateros, Crumbacher and Malot direct fiber. Not awarded.

It is hard for rural and very rural to even participate in the discussion when they feel they will always be ignored. Yet, this is a crucial issue.

Cheers,

Stanislav Fritz

From: Britta Barrett <tritesuburbanite@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 4, 2022 1:58 PM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Comment to the Digital Equity Forum

Hello,

I would like to share a suggestion for making internet access more equitable in Washington state. The internet can and should be a regulated public utility, as essential as water, electricity, and public transit. Free, high-speed public Wi-FI should be widely available to all, and personal home access could be subsidized. Like other public services, discounts could be offered for low-income, youth, and seniors.

Expand free laptop and hot spot checkouts for students, unhoused communities, and other marginalized communities. Ensure people with disabilities have access to adaptive devices and accessible services.

Remote work policies are also an equity issue. If a job can be performed remotely, that option should be made available to all workers. This will expand career opportunities for people with disabilities, neurodivergent workers, caregivers, and many more marginalized groups. Remote work also has environmental impacts, often reducing carbon emissions caused by commuting that disproportionately impact communities of color and lower-income residents.

Thanks for your consideration,

Britta Barrett

From: Linda Jones <lindajones@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov>
Sent: Thursday, June 2, 2022 1:38 PM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Involvement with Digital Equity Forum

External Email

Good Afternoon,

I am an enrolled member of The Tulalip Tribes and currently serving as a contract consultant to assist The Tribes and our own Salish Networks, ensuring that the broadband and technology needs of our community are considered in the state's planning efforts. Please advise us of how we can help in these next phases of planning and implementation strategies.

Regards,

Linda Jones,

Contract Consultant

The Tulalip Tribes/Salish Networks

(360) 716-8019

2601 88th Street NE

Tulalip, WA 98271

Digital Equity Forum public comment (meeting #3 - June 9, 2022)

Jim House spoke first

Disclosed that he/they is deaf, so the ASL interpreter (Angie) spoke for Jim.

"I am the Director/Manager for the Coalition for Inclusion Equity Planning and one of our goals is to have equity in communication for all folks. Related to the broadband plan, I'm wondering if you are allowing enough bandwidth to support ASL users in remote meetings. Often there is low bandwidth, and it really limits communication with sign language because video is needed to show signs and see movements."

Chris Cullivan spoke second.

"Who would be the best person to talk to about getting funding help for customers who want fiber internet built out to their area?"

Ann Chenhall spoke third.

"Will there be a public option for internet, or will this all be private companies driven by their profit motives?"

"I hope that there will be education sessions at Senior Centers so the elderly will also have equity as far as being able to use internet."

Email correspondence

From: David Neuenschwander <dnneuen@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Thursday, June 30, 2022 11:30 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: DEF Newsletter

External Email

A comment only:

Persons without access to a computer and the internet would have a difficult time responding to your survey.

David Neuenschwander

142 Old Lindsay Hill Rd.

Quilcene, WA 98376

360.765.3151

From: visioninmotion@earthlink.net <visioninmotion@earthlink.net>
Sent: Wednesday, July 6, 2022 10:37 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Online Survey

External Email

Hi there, I am trying to take the online Digital Equity Survey. I find the link but get sent back to the previous page. Any guidance?

Peace,

Beth Handewith Gould

(Preferred pronouns: she/her/they)

Greater Vision Life Coaching LLC

[@greatervisioncoach](#) on Facebook

Phone 360-770-5483

The Great Art consists of making continuous conscious effort to align our thoughts and feelings with the highest ideals we have thus far been able to comprehend. Rob Brezny

From: Vicki Turek <vturek4@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, July 9, 2022 9:22 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Subject: Question about DEF Community Survey

External Email

I live in Stanwood Wa in the country. I use Verzion jet pack (wyfi) and internet is really bad in and out. Phone service is horrible sometimes 1 bar

I fell outside and no service. Neighbor heard me and called fire department. I'm 76yrs old . Verizon phone and internet really spotty here. They do nothing to help us in the country..

From: Todd Holloway <toddh@cfisouth.org>
Sent: Monday, July 18, 2022 9:07 AM
To: COM Digital Equity <digitalequity@commerce.wa.gov>
Cc: Leah Velasco <leahv@cfisouth.org>; Baynes, Yenifer (DOH) <yenifer.baynes@doh.wa.gov>; Conner,
Kimberly B (DSHS/WASILC) <kimberly.conner@dshs.wa.gov>; Abdi, Fathiya (DOH) <fathiya.abdi@doh.wa.gov>;
Alan J. Knue <aknue@uw.edu>
Subject: ? joining the Digital Equity Forum?

External Email

To whom it may concern,

I've been doing work in this space for quite a while, and I'm interested in taking part in the Digital Equity Forum.
If that is possible or, other participation options exist, I would be grateful to learn more about the opportunity.
Is the Digital Equity Forum affiliated in any way with our organizational partnership with Xfinity/Comcast
Internet Essentials?

Todd Holloway

Center For Independence

(253) 582-1253 ext 104

Digital Equity Forum public comment (meeting #4 - Sept. 15, 22)

Carolyn Logue shared the following:

I represent a couple of groups in this space. The first is the Washington Library Association, and I'm hoping that there are other library participants on today. And the other group is Stride Learning, which is a Kindergarten through adult learning space doing online learning. This particularly comment or question is on behalf of the Library Association. I just wanted to know how much Digital Navigator outreach had been done into the library world, both public school and even academic, and our universities and community colleges.

Mark Detrick (Washington State Broadband Office) responded and explained that numerous libraries throughout the state have been engaged. He further elaborated recognizing the Digital Equity Forum members who are affiliated with libraries.

Appendix F: Community listening sessions

The following notes are based on what was heard during community listening sessions held on April 29 (5-6:30 p.m.), April 30 (Noon-1:30 p.m.), May 10 (5-6:30 p.m.), and May 11 (Noon-1:30 p.m.). What we heard was grouped based on the four questions that were posed to attendees, as well as additional responses that were offered outside the context of specific questions.

Question 1: Have you experienced anything that kept you from feeling connected to the internet? If yes, what are the challenges?

- Lack of fast and reliable internet connections.
- Pay for faster service and see small improvements
- Reliability and stability were frequently offered as key impediments, with many participants sharing stories of highly fluctuating internet connections that disrupted everything from work meetings to accessing streaming services.
- Reliability was discussed both in terms of fluctuating speeds and the impact of adverse weather events where service is often interrupted, and customers experience long delays with power often returning well in advance of their internet connection.
- Lack of internet service provider options, regardless of price.
- Participants shared how they frequently had no good options, regardless of how much money they were willing to pay for service.
- Challenges
- Lack of good options
- Pay for internet and cannot use internet to access other services that are being paid for, such as streaming entertainment

Impacts
- Cannot attend work meetings
- Cannot engage with elected officials
- Cannot do things that make her happy
- Cannot communicate with others during emergencies where power is lost.
- Isolation for those people who have very low internet speed, especially during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic

Approaches/Steps to Overcome
- Go to cafes and restaurants to access higher quality internet
- Purchasing "boosters" to connect to local cell tower, which is expensive and still not the highest quality service
- Drive to an area with better cell service to connect to the internet and do things.

Possible Interventions Proposed
- Basic Minimum Service
- Local Networks (referenced Anacortes Fiber Network)
- Increase digital literacy
- Require cell companies to have power backups on cell towers.

Populations (disclosed membership or referenced as being impacted)

- Veterans
- Senior
- Educators
- Kids in school
- College students
- Rural communities
- Tribal communities
- Not just rural communities, there are bandwidth deserts in urban areas as well, especially low-income areas

Q1 Additional Thoughts

- Sense that the internet is not truly public, instead access is solely determined by private companies who put profits ahead of access.
- Paying for service and not getting a usable connection
- Education
- Attendees on day two who could not participate on day one due to low quality connection
- Attendee who dropped while speaking
- Change in home use due to COVID-19 pandemic
- Sense of helplessness/lack of power for many
- Topography interferes
- Cost interferes
- ISPs seemingly have free reign to determine where to provide service and at what quality is an interference.
- Feels hopeless that anything will ever be done because the private sector has all the power.
- Repeated expression of frustration about being in such close proximity to the state's capital (Olympia) and having low quality internet service.
- Repeated expression in being a resident in one of the state's known for technological innovation, but having low quality internet service.

Question 2: What do you need to be able to use the internet for your personal life?

- Higher speeds for streaming entertainment
- Good equipment, especially routers that can get good distribution throughout your home.
- References to paying to rent equipment from ISPs that is inferior and then having to buy extra equipment to have a connection all over their home
- Quality of equipment
- More reliable connection to be able to access content, especially live streaming content
- Strong internet connection, technology, and training - all three
- Faster and more reliable connection
- Training… knows that there are more uses and resources, but older and never learned about the internet
- For more organizations to recognize and respect the needs of the visually impaired… to have websites that work with screen readers and other accessibility devices/software

- Certain Telehealth applications and webpages have no headings or buttons that can be used with a screen reader
- Usable is not the same as accessible
- Training for the visually impaired to know how to use the internet, both overall and with the assistance of accessibility devices and software
- Also needs the internet connection to be strong and stable enough to use accessibility software, devices, and features
- Fast/Strong and reliable internet connection
- To be able to solely rely on home internet connection… often has to use cell phone connection because home connection is too slow
- Appreciates how the Washington State Legislators have made themselves available via Zoom during the pandemic, but that is undermined by losing your connection in the middle of a conversation with your representative.

Personal Uses
- Streaming movies and live tv (news, sports, etc.)
- Entertainment providers, such as PBS, are increasingly offering content that is exclusively on the internet. If you don't have a good connection, you cannot access that content.
- Applying for unemployment
- Feeling a connection to one's community
- Pursue economic opportunities that might be exclusive to the internet
- Accessing Telehealth
- Civic Participation/E-Governance

Q2 Additional Thoughts
- Digital skills training programs are needed in communities
- Trainings must be in multiple languages and offered in a way that is aligned with different communities' norms and practices
- If you don't know how to setup an email account, you will immediately hit a wall when trying to do things on the internet
- Cascading effect
- Got sick, wanted daughter to come provide some care. Internet connection was too slow for daughter to be able to work from home at her mother's home, so the sick mother had to pay for a caretaker.
- More people working from home, which is changing their relationship and understanding about at home internet options. Previously, maybe using a little for light purposes… now using it for work, streaming, maybe a child who is earning a degree.

Question 3: What do you need to be able to use the internet for your job?
- Consistent and reliable internet connection
- Robust enough connection for everyone in the home to be able to use the internet how they want or need.
- Higher quality equipment from providers, specifically WiFi routers, so there is not the need to purchase multiple lines of service to cover a single homeless shelter (residents + staff)
- Consistent and quality connection
- Quick restoration when connections are lost
- ISPs are much slower than the electric companies

- For the internet to be regulated more like water and electricity
- Affordable, stable, and high speed
- Symmetrical Speeds - solid download, but upload is very slow (important for professionals who are working with large files)
- To not have to rely on cobbling together multiple approaches to have a somewhat solid and reliable connection
- DSL, HotSpot, and mobile

Uses for Job
- Employers are becoming more open to full or part-time work from home, and with that comes more expectations of what you can do from home. If your speed is slow or unreliable, it makes it so you cannot work from home.
- Not only threatens the ability to work from home, but also can look bad when you drop during meetings or other work-related meetings - can threaten the opportunity for promotions or continued employment.
- Providing access to people who are trying to transition from unhoused to housed, and they need to be able to connect with family, seek employment opportunities, get education/training, as well as the more traditional uses like streaming entertainment and exploring the web.
- File transfers, such as for professionals doing audio and video editing

Possible Interventions
- Apply pressure to internet service providers to offer more tiers or packages that meet the needs of people who have to work from home. There needs to be more levels of service to reflect the diversity of uses.

Q3 Additional Thoughts
- Changed ISPs multiple times during the pandemic, and all are pretty much equally bad
- A bad storm almost always means that there will be a loss of the internet connection. Confused why companies won't bury their lines.
- Addressing digital equity can be a job creation initiative
- Confused why the state known for tech innovation still has areas with little to no solid internet connection
- Our underserved communities are falling further behind as we become more reliant on internet connections and digital literacy, and as they have some combination of unaffordable internet access or no real access at all.

Question Four: What would help you feel more supported in your need for using the internet?
- Governments requiring internet companies to cover all homes in an area, instead of just picking and choosing based on revenues.
- More competition
- Requiring generators on cell phone towers
- More support for community-based organizations that want to provide digital literacy training
- This is important because many of these communities have people, especially elders, who will only feel comfortable asking questions and truly learning from someone they trust and that speaks their language.

- Would like to see governments at all level see this in the same way that rural electrification and highway and railroad extension projects were seen in the past - internet access is not a bonus or optional, it is a must in 2022 if you're going to live a full life. You can opt out, but you must have the power to choose that option… not the internet company.
- Robust strategies to address digital equity
- Digital Literacy training
- More mindfulness that digital isolation is a real thing and have negative impacts on people.
- Not just about speeds and reliability, it's about knowing how to use the internet
- Access to affordable and high quality equipment, both for accessing the internet (such as WiFi routers) and using the internet
- Access to information in accessible formats (large fonts, contrasting colors, connections for braille displays, design that will work with screen readers)
- Tech support that is not overly reliant on visual information
- "I cannot tell you the color on the modem"
- Supporting individuals and communities that want to further embrace the possibilities of the internet, but who have been ignored by the internet service providers
- Recognition that social, mental, economic, and emotional wellbeing are all negatively impacted when people cannot access reliable and strong internet connections in the 21st century.
- To be able to get the same service that $100 per month will buy in Seattle. Currently paying more than a friend who lives in Seattle, and getting much lower quality service.
- To be proud of our digital connectivity in Washington… instead of constantly having to battle with companies for the service that is being paid for… I am proud to live in a state that has produced many of the most important technology companies on the planet, now let's focus on being proud of our connectivity.

Additional offerings

- Don't just assume that younger people fully know how to use the internet.
- The concept of digital equity needs to be more broadly discussed, promoted, and people need to be aware.
- Digital literacy connects to internet security, especially for older people who are increasingly being victimized by internet-based scams
- Cannot just give access, a little training, and then drop onto the internet
- If governments are going to require people to sign up for services online, then there is some responsibility for governments to make certain that people can get online and know how to sign up for those services.
- Need to better understand that different people use different kinds of devices to get on the internet, not everyone is using a computer or laptop.
- Would like to see monies set aside to train people to learn the skillsets needed to help activate and connect their communities to internet.