



EMPLOYMENT AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Office of Broadband Development 2025 Digital Equity Act Update



January 7, 2025

Today's Agenda

1. Background information: what is digital equity?
2. Current state of digital equity
3. Future opportunities

Housekeeping Bits:

- The intent of this webinar is to provide an update. No grant funds are currently available. Grant funds will be available in the future.
- Please put all questions in the chat. They will be addressed at the end of the webinar.
- This webinar is being recorded. The recording and slides will be posted on OBD's website.

About Office of Broadband Development (OBD)

- Established by state legislature in 2013
- 14 staff located throughout Minnesota
- Programs:

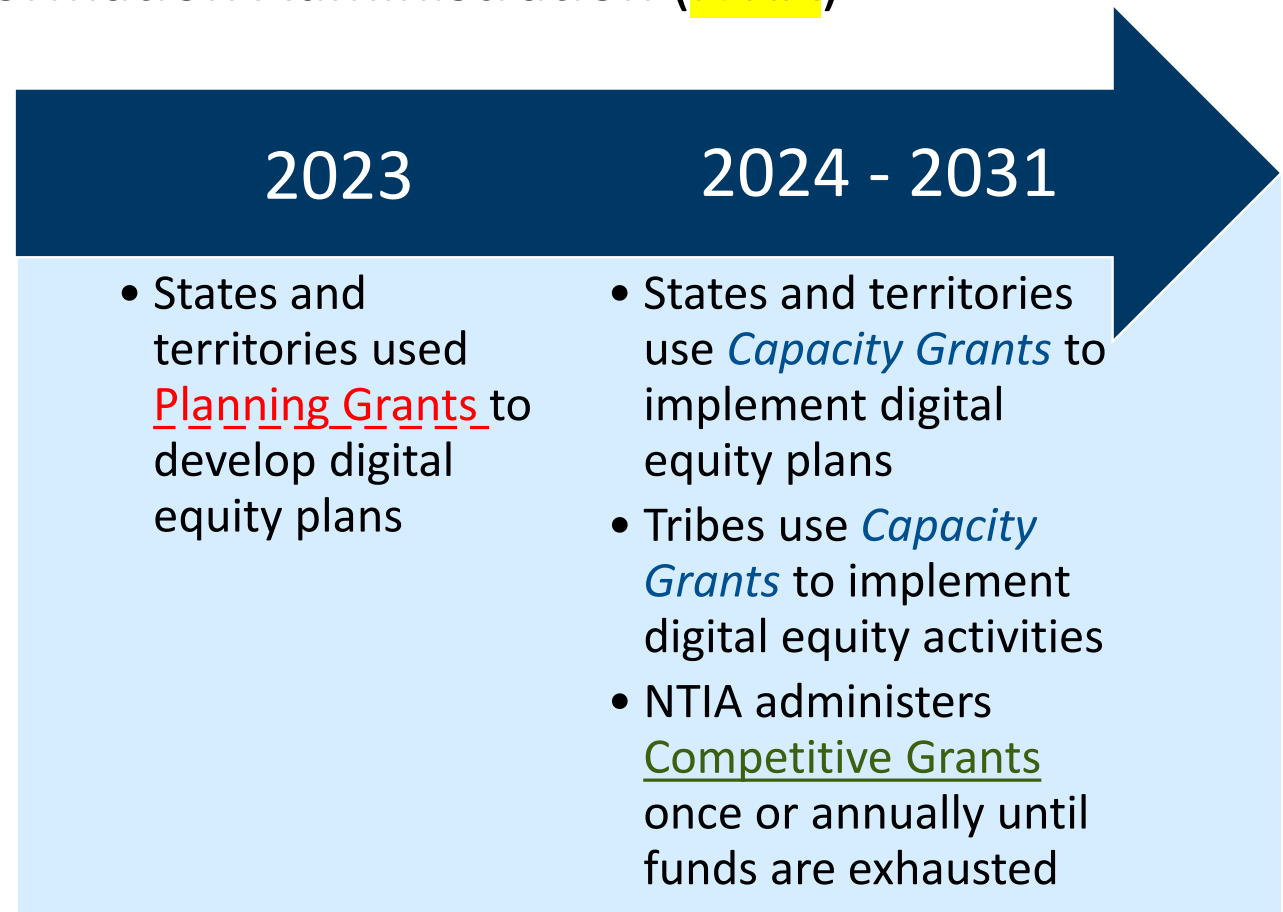
- Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program
- Low-Density Broadband Development Grant Program
- Line Extension Program
- IJJA: BEAD

Eligible applicants
are internet service
providers.

- IJJA: Digital Equity Act

Digital Equity Act: The Basics

- Included in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA; November 2021); administered by National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
- Provides \$2.75B for digital equity work
- Three funding categories:
 - \$60M in planning grants to state and territories (MN = \$881,905.10)
 - \$1.44B in *capacity grants* to states, tribes, and territories (MN = \$12,033,288.01)
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Covered Populations

- Low-income households
- Aging individuals 60+ years old
- Incarcerated individuals
- Veterans
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with language barriers (limited English-speaking or low literacy)
- Individuals who are members of a minoritized racial or ethnic group
- Rural individuals (cities under 50,000 not adjacent to cities of more than 50,000)

Digital Equity

the **condition** in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy

opportunities and options

National Digital Inclusion Alliance

Digital Inclusion

the **activities** necessary to ensure all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of technology

1. affordable internet;
2. internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
3. access to digital literacy training;
4. quality technical support; and
5. applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration

National Digital Inclusion Alliance

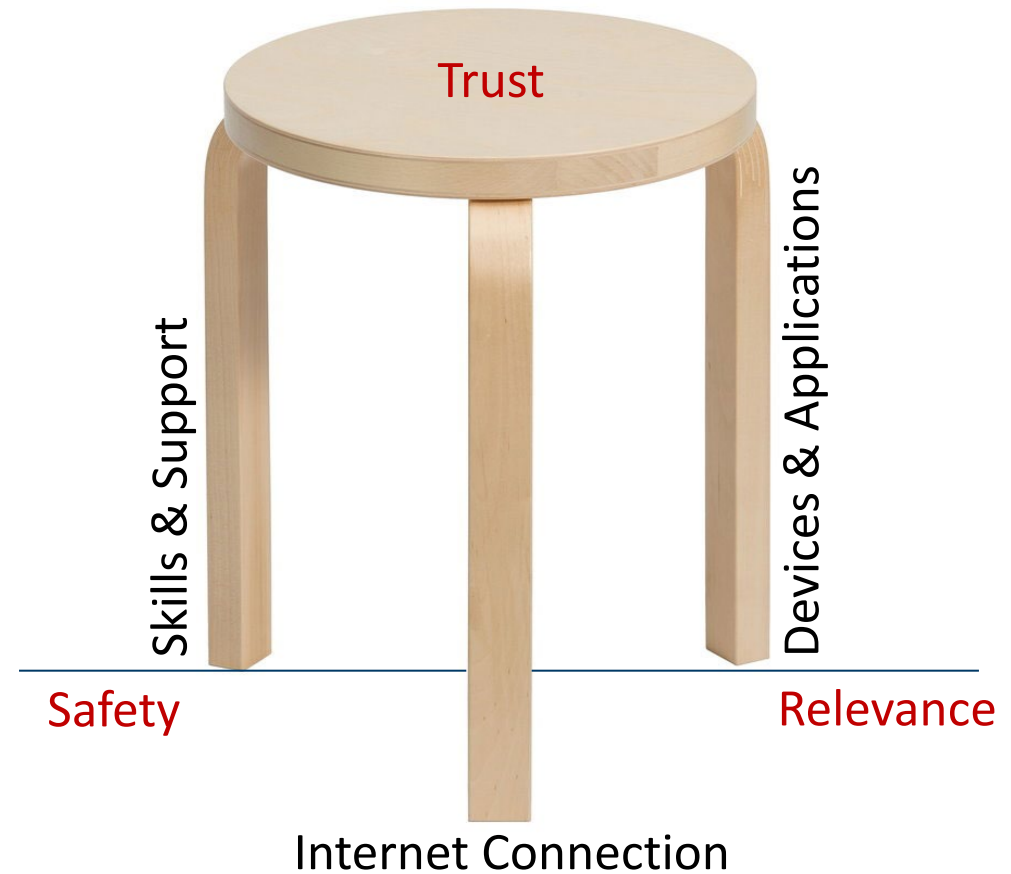
Components of Digital Inclusion

Who is using this stool?
Why are they using this stool?
Why aren't they using this stool?
Is one stool enough?
Would they benefit from a seatback?
Do they want armrests?
What is this stool standing on?
What is the stool made of?
Who built the stool?
Is this stool sturdy?



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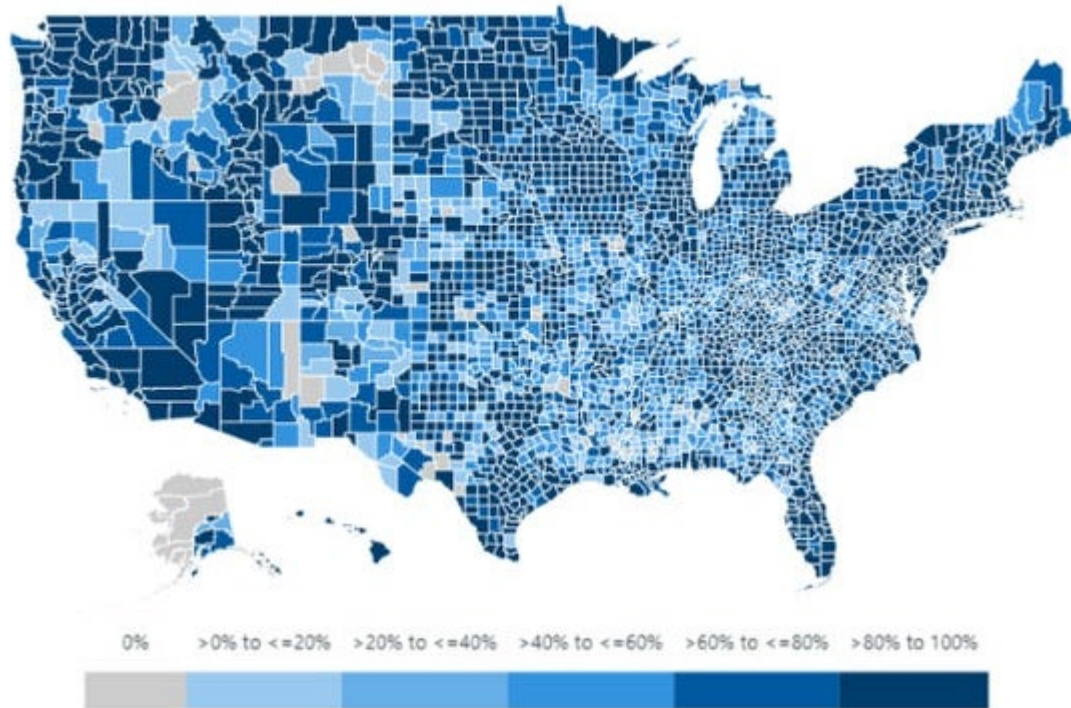


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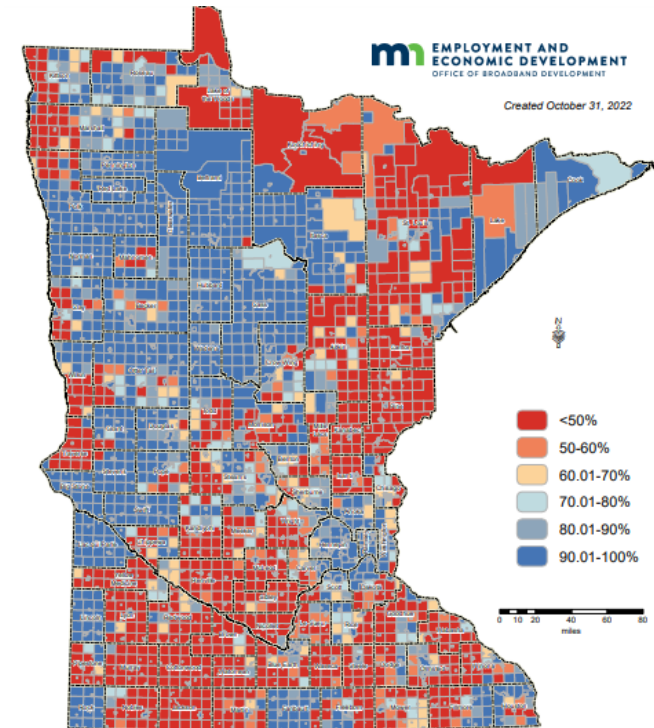
Current State of Digital Opportunity: Availability

Counties: Fixed service at or above 25/3



SOURCE: Federal Communications Commission.

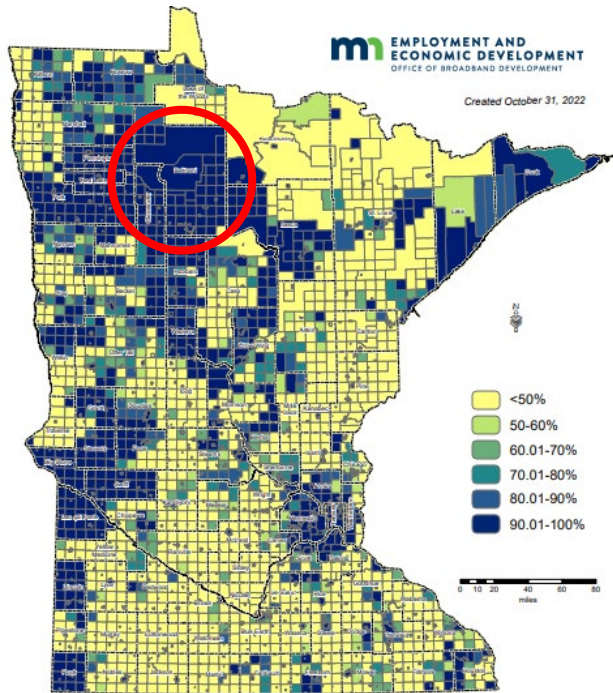
Townships: Fixed service at or above 25/3



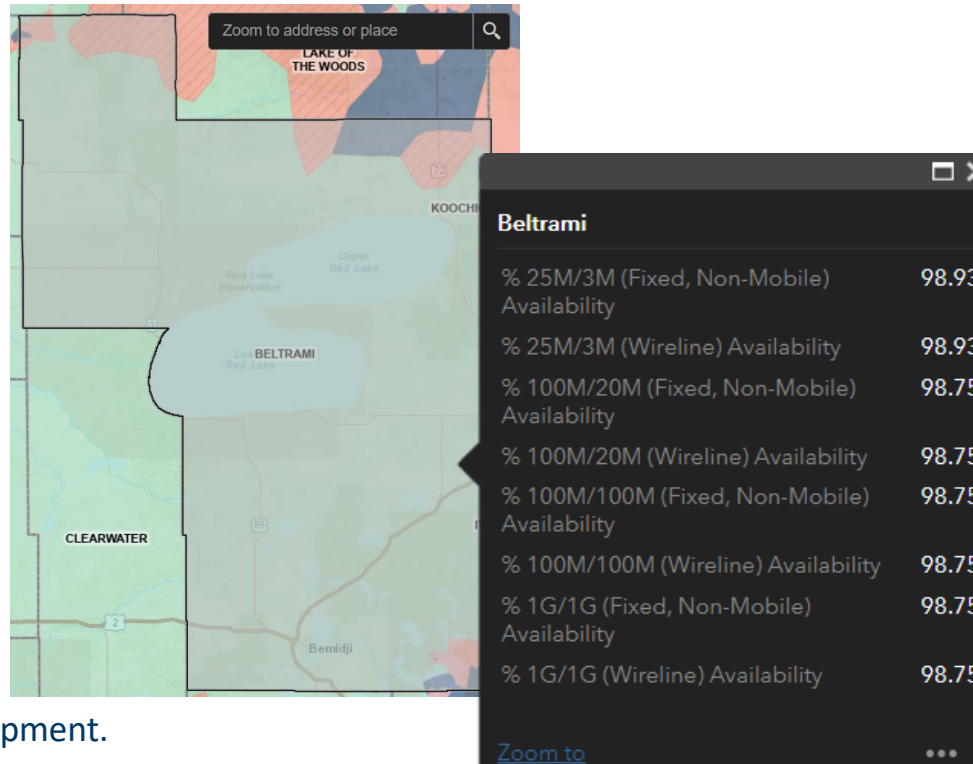
SOURCE: MN Office of Broadband Development.

Maps Tell Us One Part of One Story

Townships: Fixed service > 100/20

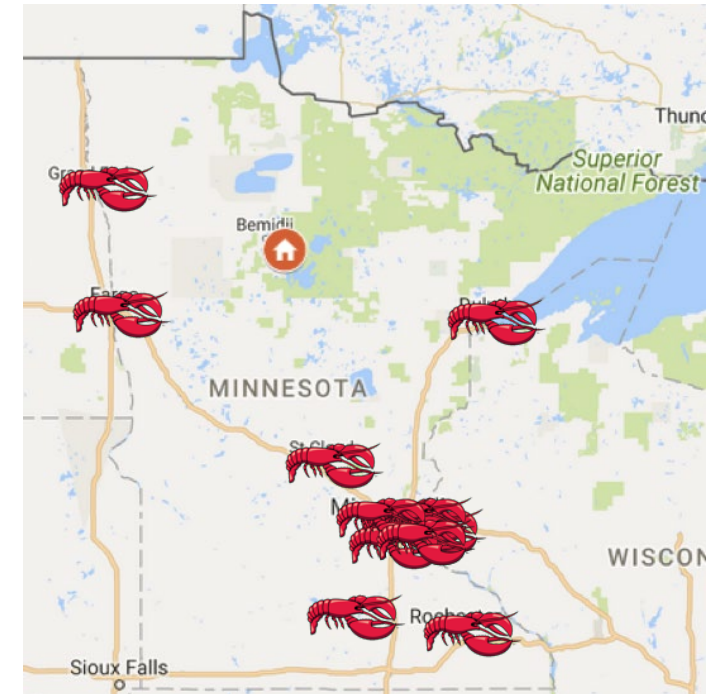


Beltrami County: Fixed service > 100/20



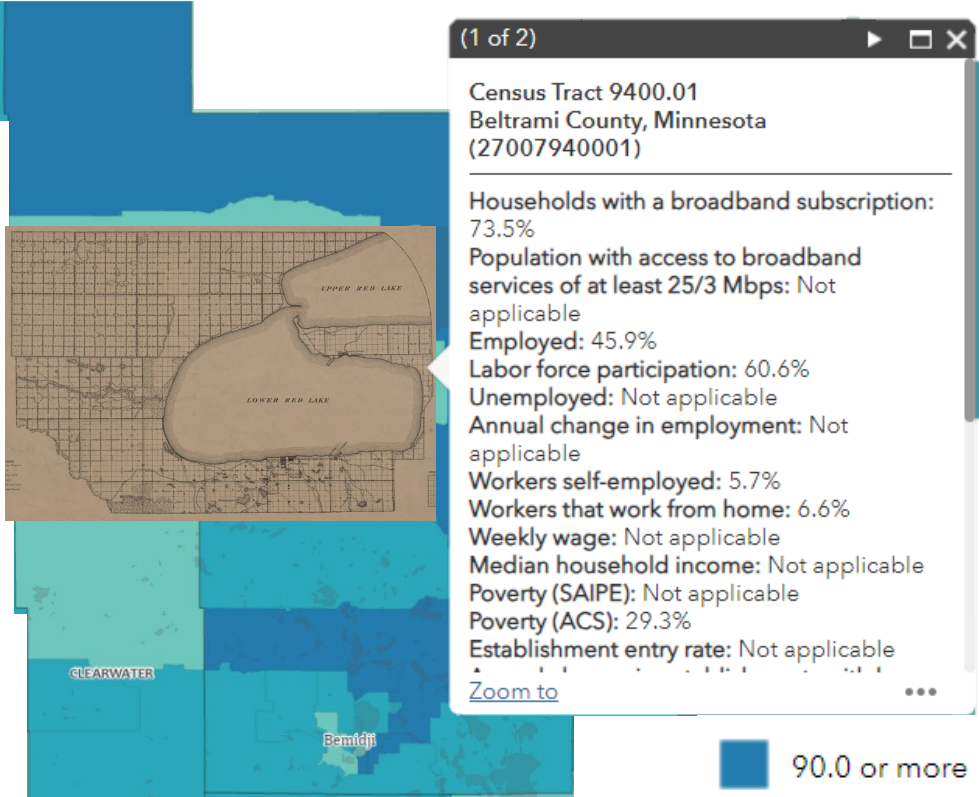
SOURCE: MN Office of Broadband Development.

The Red Lobster Ruralness Metric®



SOURCE: Red Lobster.

Access is Complex



Beltrami County Census Tracts:
Households with Broadband Subscriptions



BROADBAND MAP SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, ACCESS BROADBAND Dashboard.
HISTORICAL MAP SOURCE: University of Minnesota.

Broadband Subscriptions vs. Mobile Data

Group of People	Broadband Subscription	Mobile Data Only
All MN Households	83.7%	10.9%
People Living in Greater MN	66.8%	12.2%
Adults Ages 60+	79.6%	11.8%
People from Minoritized Racial/Ethnic Groups	78.5%	17.4%
Veterans	81.5%	10.2%
People with Disabilities	79.0%	10.8%
People Experiencing Language Barriers	65.3%	21.5%
People Living Under 150% Poverty	75.4%	19.0%

SOURCE: 2017-22 American Community Survey, retrieved from IPUMS.

Computers vs. Smartphones

Group of People	Laptop or Desktop	Smartphone Only
All Minnesotans	82.1%	7.0%
People Living in Greater MN	77.6%	8.2%
Adults Ages 60+	77.4%	6.0%
People from Minoritized Racial/Ethnic Groups	78.4%	17.2%
Veterans	81.0%	5.8%
People with Disabilities	69.8%	10.3%
People Experiencing Language Barriers	63.0%	28.6%
People Living Under 150% Poverty	68.5%	19.2%

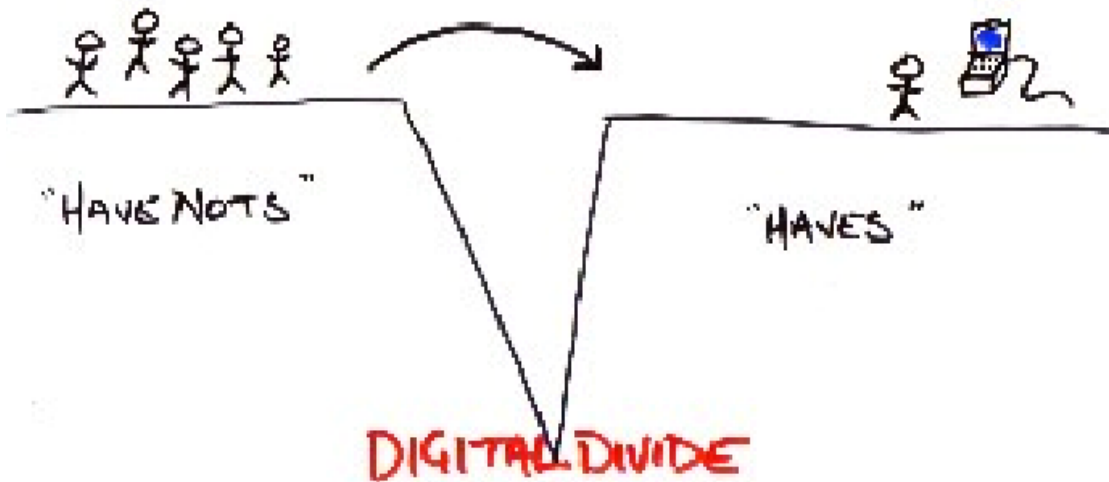
SOURCE: 2017-22 American Community Survey, retrieved from IPUMS.

MN Residents: By English Language Skills

	Internet Subscription	Laptop or Desktop	Smartphone	Smartphone Only
Speaks English Well	93.2%	87.3%	92.3%	9.0%
Speaks A Little English	88.0%	70.7%	93.0%	24.6%
Speaks No English	87.4%	57.7%	87.4%	30.5%

SOURCE: 2017-22 American Community Survey, retrieved from IPUMS.

It's Complicated



VS.



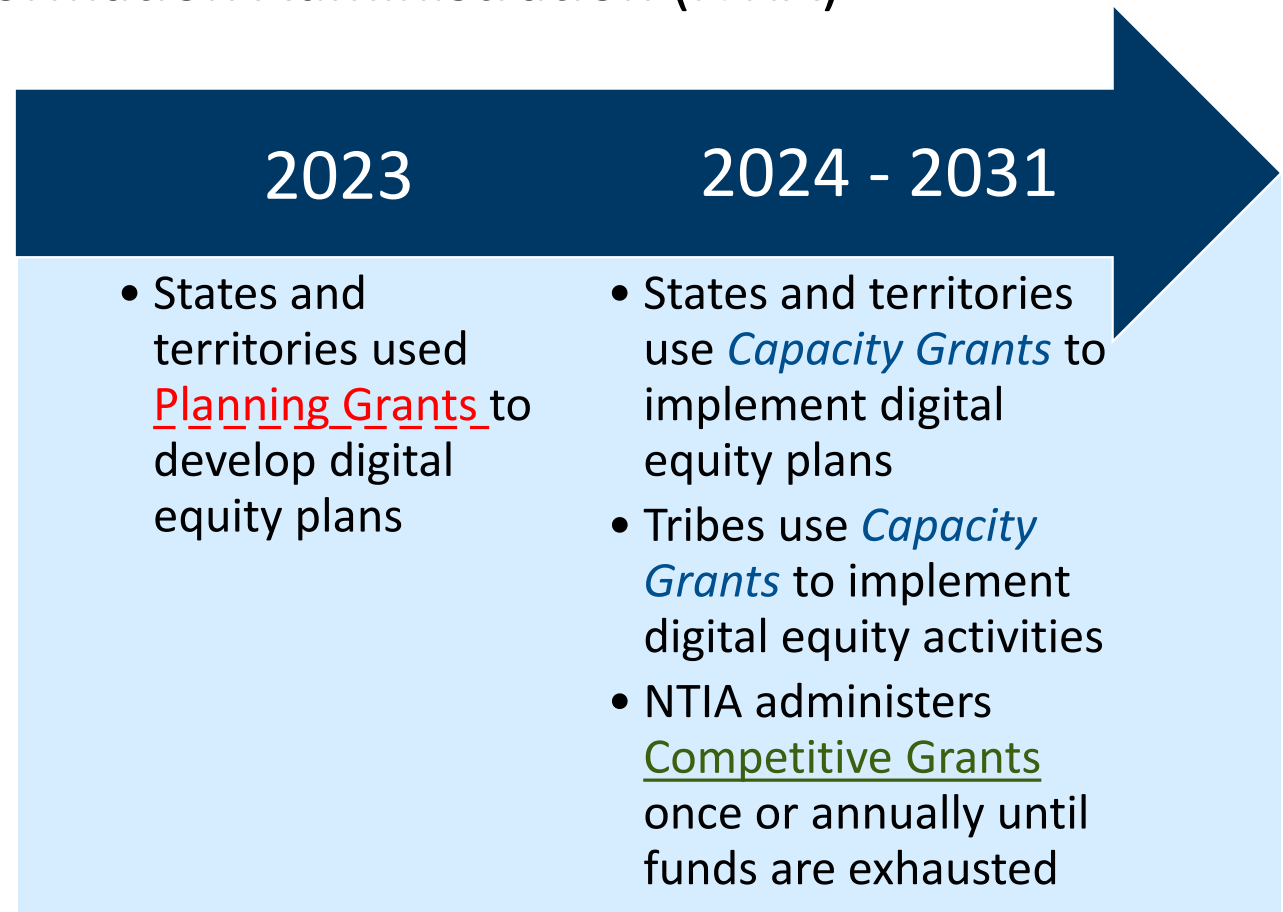
Eubanks, Virginia E. [“Trapped in the Digital Divide: The Distributive Paradigm in Community Informatics.”](#) *Journal of Community Informatics* 3 (2007): n. pag.

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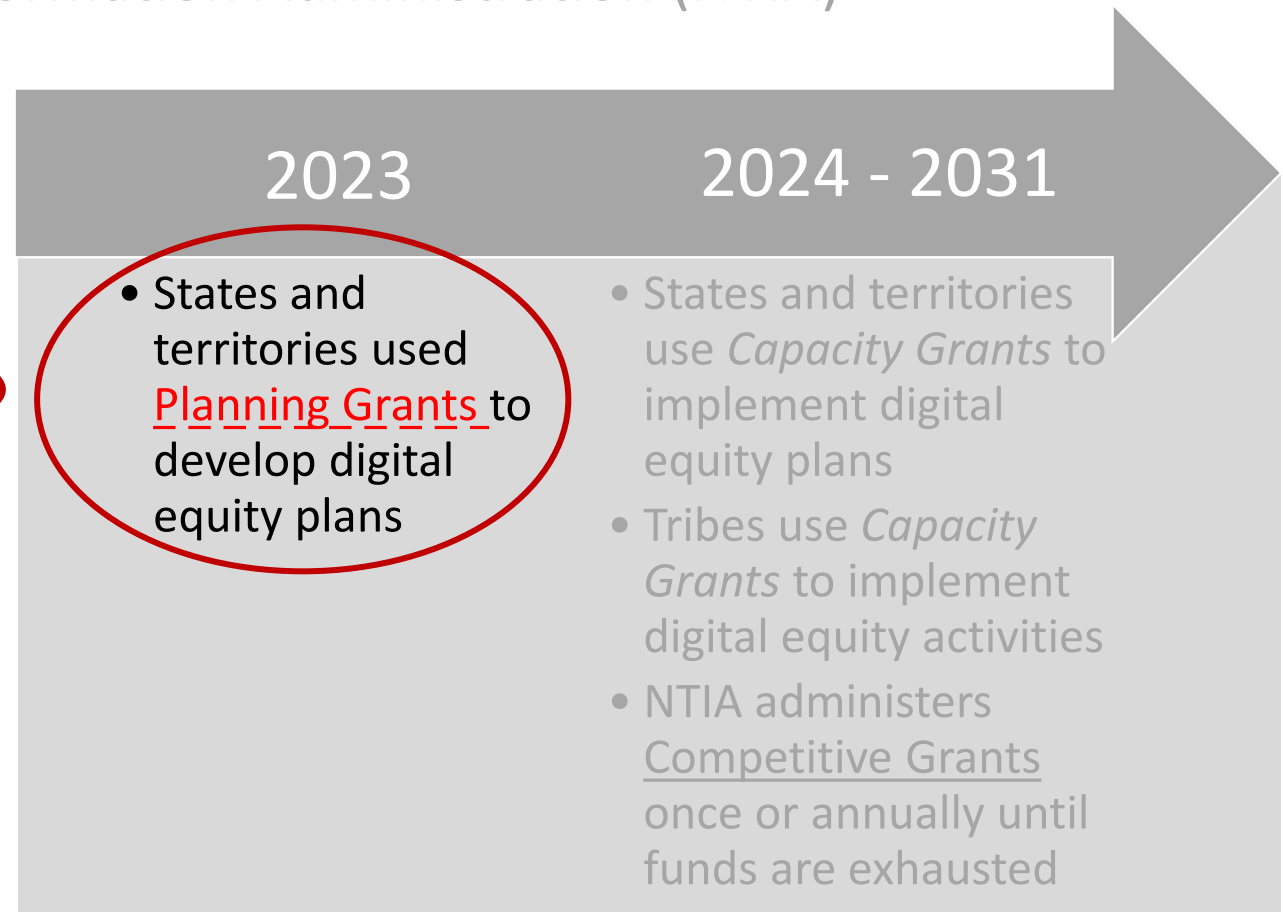
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State Digital Equity Planning Grants

- Non-competitive, formula grants
- Awardees: states and territories
- The obvious question: How will Minnesota use some federal funding to address digital equity across 8 covered populations?
- The underlying question: How can Minnesota equitably create an equity plan?

- Low-income households
- Aging individuals 60+ years old
- Incarcerated individuals
- Veterans
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2023: MN's Digital Opportunity Planning Process



April–June 2023: Data Collection

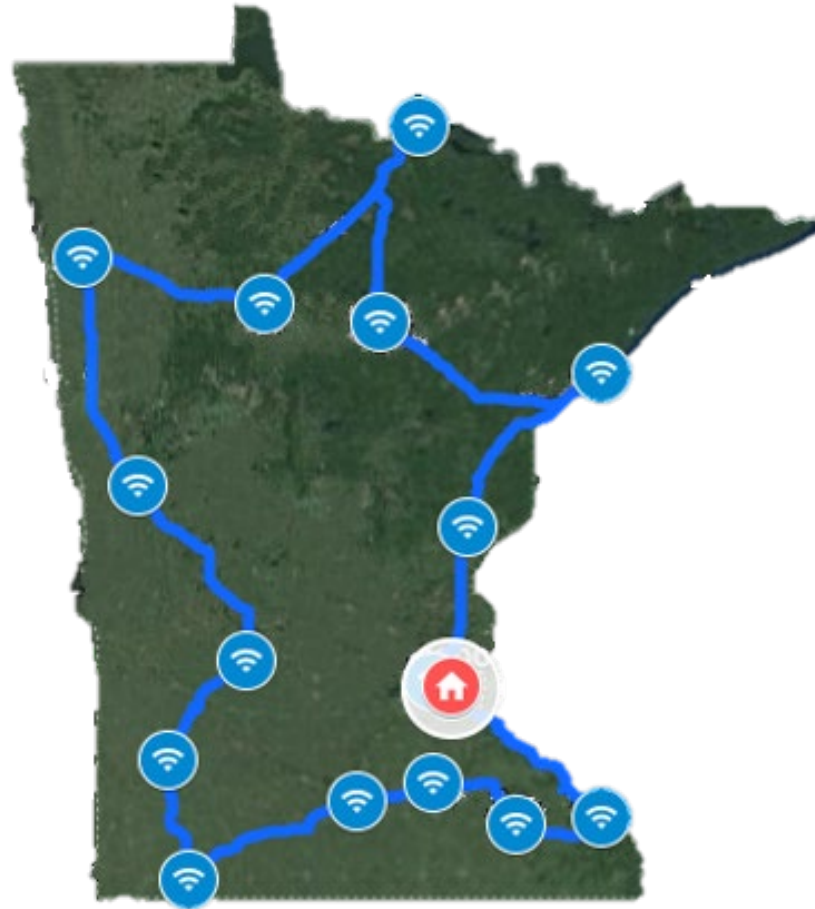
July 2023: Writing

Aug–Sept 2023: Public Comment



106 Digital Connection Committees wrangled by 2 OBD staff

- Statewide representation with an even mix of rural and urban
- 68 non-competitive mini-grants to support data collection
- 236 data files addressing strengths, necessities, and systemic challenges
- 154 face-to-face meetings between OBD, committees, and additional planning partners



18 Listening Sessions attended by all OBD staff

- 16 in-person + 2 virtual
- 304 attendees
- 14 DCC cohosts
- 35 hours convening
- 2,500+ miles driven
- 66 written public comments totaling 203 pages

What's in the Plan?

- Focus on digital *opportunity* instead of digital *equity*
- Scope: “an exploratory document coupled with programmatic goals that are achievable through a State Digital Equity Capacity Grant”
- Vision: “This plan envisions a future where digital equity connects all Minnesota residents to opportunities, options, and each other.”
 - Goal 1: Connect people to people
 - Goal 2: Connect people to information
 - Goal 3: Connect people to resources

Digital connection depends on human connection. As such, OBD's intention with these three goals is to center people—not things—in all digital opportunity planning, activities, and solutions.

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Digital Equity Competitive Grants

Source

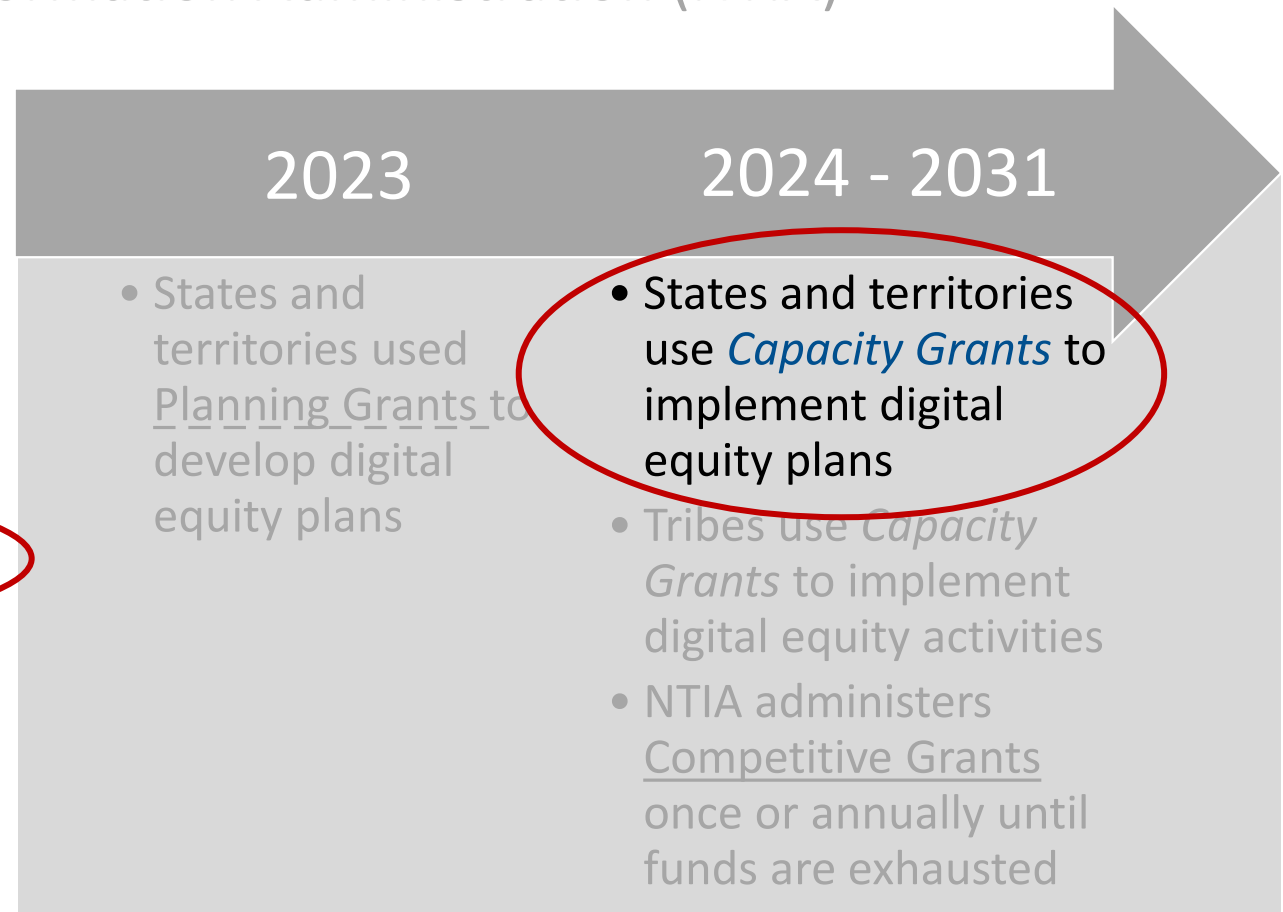
- Administered entirely by NTIA; OBD has no say in these
- NOFO and application materials were released July 23 and due September 23
- \$1.25B available; most awards will range from \$5M - \$12M
- Eligible entities: political subdivisions, agencies, tribes, non-profits, anchor institutions, workforce programs, etc.
- Over 700 applicants! 24 first-round recipients totaling \$250M were announced yesterday:

- Hmong American Partnership
- Minnesota State System of Colleges & Universities

CONGRATULATIONS!

Digital Equity Act: The Basics

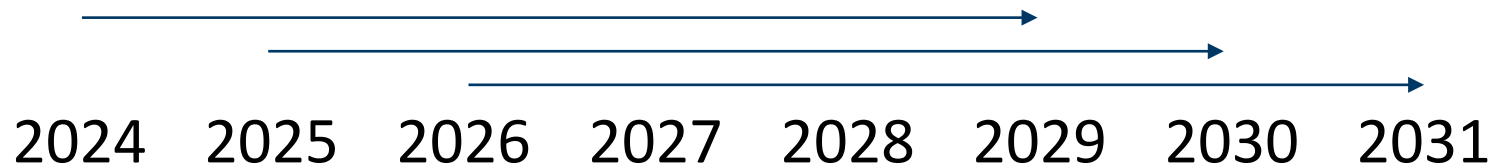
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State Digital Equity Capacity Grants

Source

- Non-competitive, formula grants to states and territories
- Funds awarded across 3 separate NOFOs and applications (approx. 50%, 25%, 25%) with periods of performance of 5 years

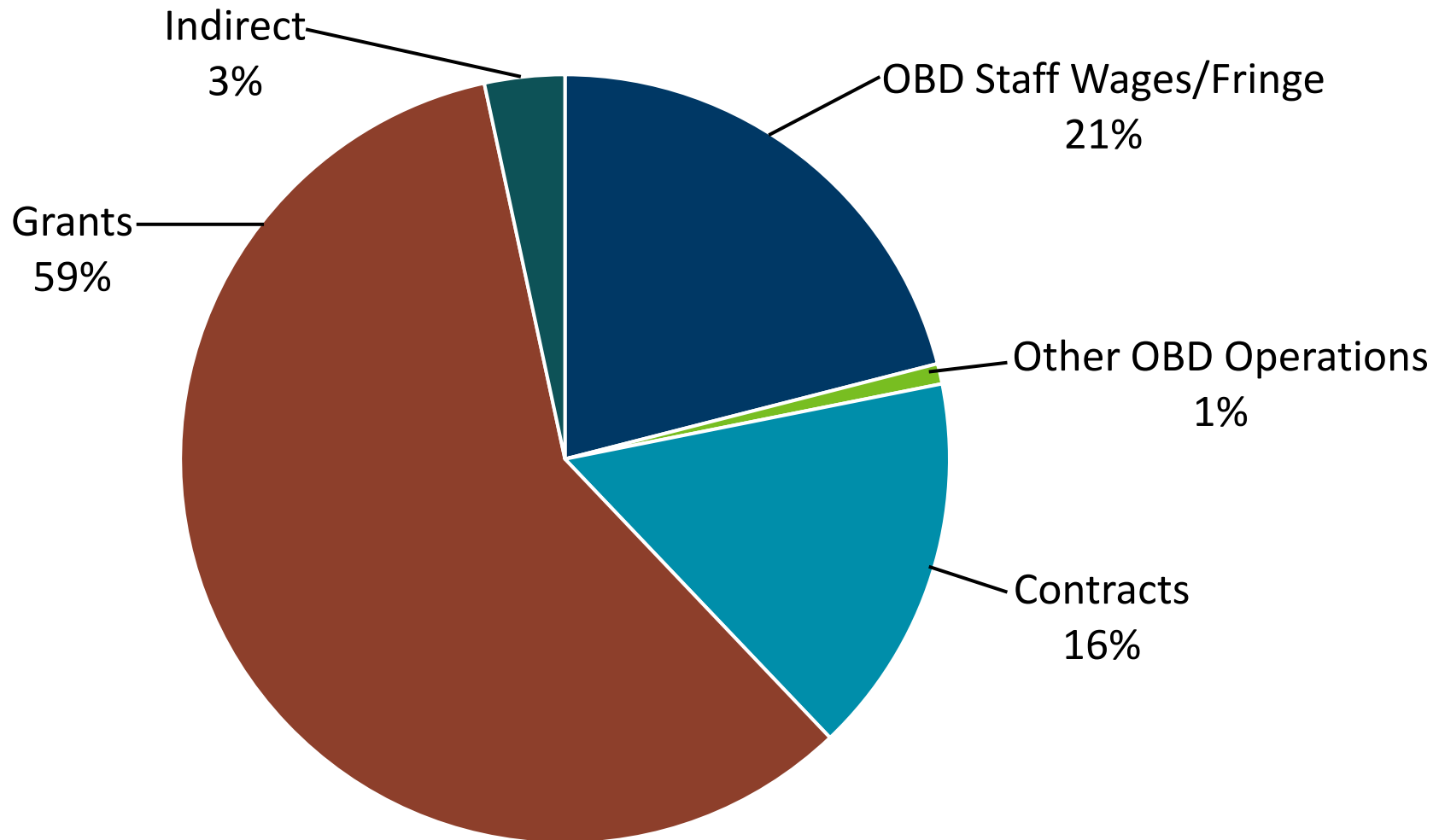


- Caps: 20% plan updates; 10% internet affordability programs; 5% evaluation; 3% administrative
- Minnesota is approved for \$12,033,288.01

2024: Adventures in Approval

- March 26 MN's Digital Opportunity Plan approved by NTIA
- May 24 MN submitted Capacity grant application to NTIA
- Mid-July MN addressed corrections ("curing") requested by NTIA
- July 27 NTIA forwarded MN's application to NIST
- Aug – Oct 29 MN addressed corrections requested by NIST (more curing)
- Oct 30 NTIA's press release announcing MN's Capacity grant award ("approved")
- Nov 15 NIST sent MN the draft of the CD-450 (federal form that says, "okay, GO!")
- Dec 6 NIST confirmed finalized CD-450; MN's grant award is official
- Sept 1, 2025 MN's **Specific Projects Form** deadline

\$12M: Where It's Going



Future Opportunities

- **Collaborative opportunity:** The following entities will be offered non-competitive awards (amount TBD) to create and implement their own local/regional digital opportunity plans (aiming for mid-2025):
 - Cities
 - Area Agencies on Aging
 - Regional Public Library Systems
 - Counties
 - Community Action Agencies
 - Centers for Independent Living
 - Tribes
 - Veterans Homes
 - Regional Development Commissions
- **Networking opportunity:** OBD will pilot a Digital Opportunity Leaders Network to combine local energy, regional expertise, and statewide continuity (aiming for mid-2025)
- **Competitive opportunity:** OBD will run a competitive grant program (amount TBD) for organizations seeking to imagine and carry out a digital equity project of any scale (aiming for 2026)

For the Latest News

- Subscribe to our [biweekly newsletter](#)
- Contact us:
 - deed.broadband.equity@state.mn.us
 - hannah.buckland@state.mn.us
- Join us at 1pm to learn more about BEAD!