

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Digital Equity Action Agenda



FRANKLIN COUNTY
DIGITAL EQUITY COALITION

Acknowledgments

This plan would not be possible without the many people and organizations who contributed to make this a community-wide Action Agenda for a better future in Franklin County.

Franklin County Digital Equity COALITION STEERING COMMITTEE

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COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

All residents, business and organization representatives, regional partners, workshop participants and survey respondents.

PROJECT TEAM

Jordan Davis, Executive Director, Smart Columbus / **Ore Ishola**, Digital Inclusion Manager, Smart Columbus / **August Majtenyi**, Design Research Intern, Smart Columbus / **Pam O’Grady**, Deputy Director, City of Columbus Department of Technology / **Sam Orth**, Director, City of Columbus, Department of Technology / **Andriya Veintimilla**, Design Research Lead, Smart Columbus / **Scott Walthour**, Independent Consultant

Completed and published October 2022.

Process

The Franklin County Digital Equity Action Agenda was constructed using DEC insights gleaned from coordinated crisis response and resident engagement work that began in 2020. Community values, as articulated in the [Columbus Way](#), ground this Agenda in collaboration, inclusivity, fellowship, ambition, and the common good, as well as in principles of accountability, respect, integrity, and trust.

The six-month process to document this Agenda was collaborative and emphasized the importance of including a diverse set of perspectives and implementers across the community. The process incorporated a number of inputs both locally and nationally. This approach ensured a comprehensive awareness of the dynamics surrounding the digital equity space, including the changing federal funding landscape and community specific considerations. It also incorporated viewpoints on cultural competency and implementation capabilities across organizations. The following outlines the steps and approximate amount of time devoted to major building blocks of this Agenda.

Ecosystem Alignment (7 Weeks)

- » **Stakeholder Interviews**—Facilitated stakeholder interviews to align on shared goals and priority focus areas
- » **Community Activity Matrix**—Collected data to map existing digital inclusion activity across the community

Understand Needs & Best Practices (12 Weeks)

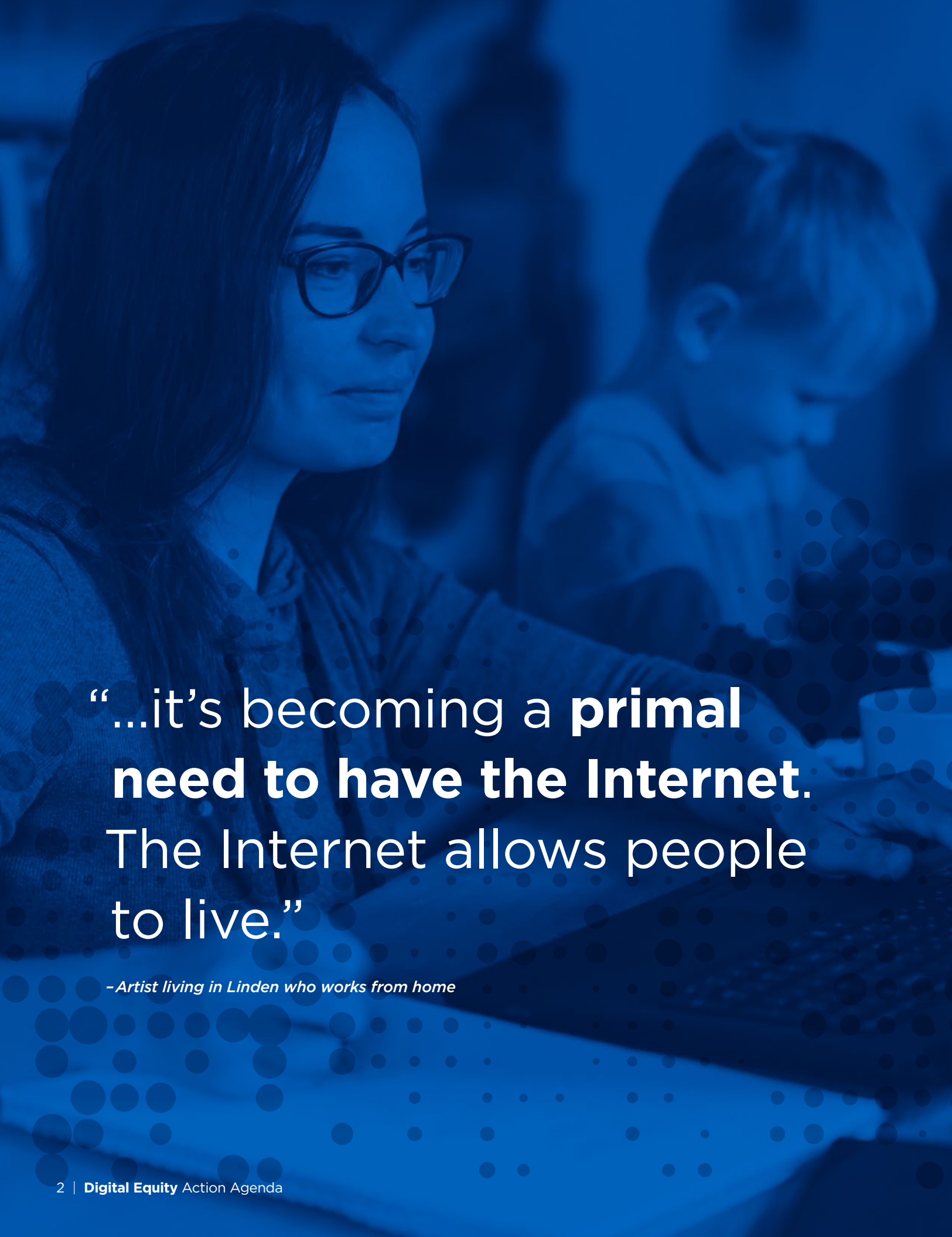
- » **Sizing the Need**—Research to understand size of the need through data
 - Supply side: infrastructure, speeds, costs
 - Demand side: household tech access, key barriers
- » **National Best Practice Assessment** (NDIA Conference, San Antonio, Chattanooga/Tech Goes Home, Charlotte, and ChiXDesign Comparisons)
- » **Codifying local understanding of needs**—Identified learnings from local efforts underway in Franklin County today

Create a Strategy to Address the Needs (7 Weeks)

- » **Facilitated 9 workshops** to assess technical & financial requirements and pressure test solutions
- » **Recommend solutions** and path forward for program priorities

DELIVERABLES OF THIS ACTION AGENDA

- » **Alignment across key stakeholders on the objectives** (e.g., focus areas, adoption levels, sustainable solutions)
- » **Understanding of the barriers** to access including availability, affordability, and adoption
- » **Recommendations to close the gap** impacting under-resourced households, students, older adults, veterans, workforce, disabled, New Americans and the justice involved
- » **Roadmap and activation Agenda** with timelines, milestones, stakeholder roles, and required investment for key initiatives



“...it’s becoming a **primal need to have the Internet.** The Internet allows people to live.”

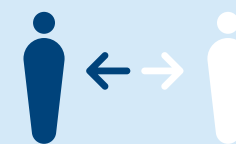
–Artist living in Linden who works from home

Executive Summary

The **digital divide is the gap we aim to close** between those who have affordable access to connectivity, devices, skills, and support and those who do not. Though this divide has been apparent since the dawn of the Internet, socio-economic changes magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need to level the playing field for digital opportunity now. **Digital Inclusion activities are necessary** to ensure under-resourced individuals have access to the Internet, including reliable connections

and skills needed to use the web. The pandemic accelerated digital transformation, changing how we learn, work, receive healthcare, obtain information, and connect with each other. Digital Inclusion activities must evolve as technology evolves. **Achieving digital equity will enable Franklin County’s future prosperity** — a future in which all individuals and communities have the digital capacity needed to fully participate in society, democracy and the economy.

DIGITAL DIVIDE
(The Problem)



The **digital divide** is the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not.

DIGITAL INCLUSION
(The Work)

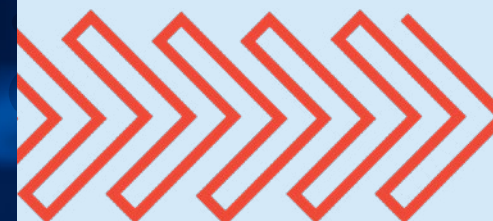


Digital inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Digital inclusion must evolve as technology advances.

DIGITAL EQUITY
(The Goal)



Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services.



The Franklin County Digital Equity Action Agenda defines and articulates the issues, approaches and foundational work needed to achieve digital equity in Central Ohio. This Action Agenda builds upon Franklin County Digital Equity Coalition's (DEC) 2021 Digital Equity Framework, as well as over a year of coordinated crisis response efforts and human-centered design work. These efforts laid the foundation for a collaborative planning process that led to

this Agenda, focusing efforts on overarching priorities and high impact objectives that stand to make the greatest difference in closing the digital divide in Franklin County.

This Action Agenda precedes a more detailed implementation plan that will be developed based on funding decisions made by the City, County and others, and will detail strategies for execution.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To make meaningful progress toward achieving Digital Equity, organizations and individuals in Franklin County must work to ensure all under-resourced residents have the digital resources necessary to live, learn, earn, and play in Franklin County, by:

- **Ensuring under-resourced residents have access** to residential Internet, connected devices, and digital skills training opportunities
- **At an equitable level of quality** that enables today's online experiences, and
- **At an affordable price** point for low-income households.

1

DIGITAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Completed in Spring 2021

Articulation of the community's vision for closing the digital divide, identification of priorities, and framework for community organizing.

2

DIGITAL EQUITY ACTION AGENDA

Completed in Summer 2022

Articulation of the needs, approaches, and foundational work. Documentation of the resulting recommendations for funding and implementation.

3

DIGITAL EQUITY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Development of tactical, detailed operational plans of the funded objectives and strategies of the Action Agenda built off the initial framework.

4

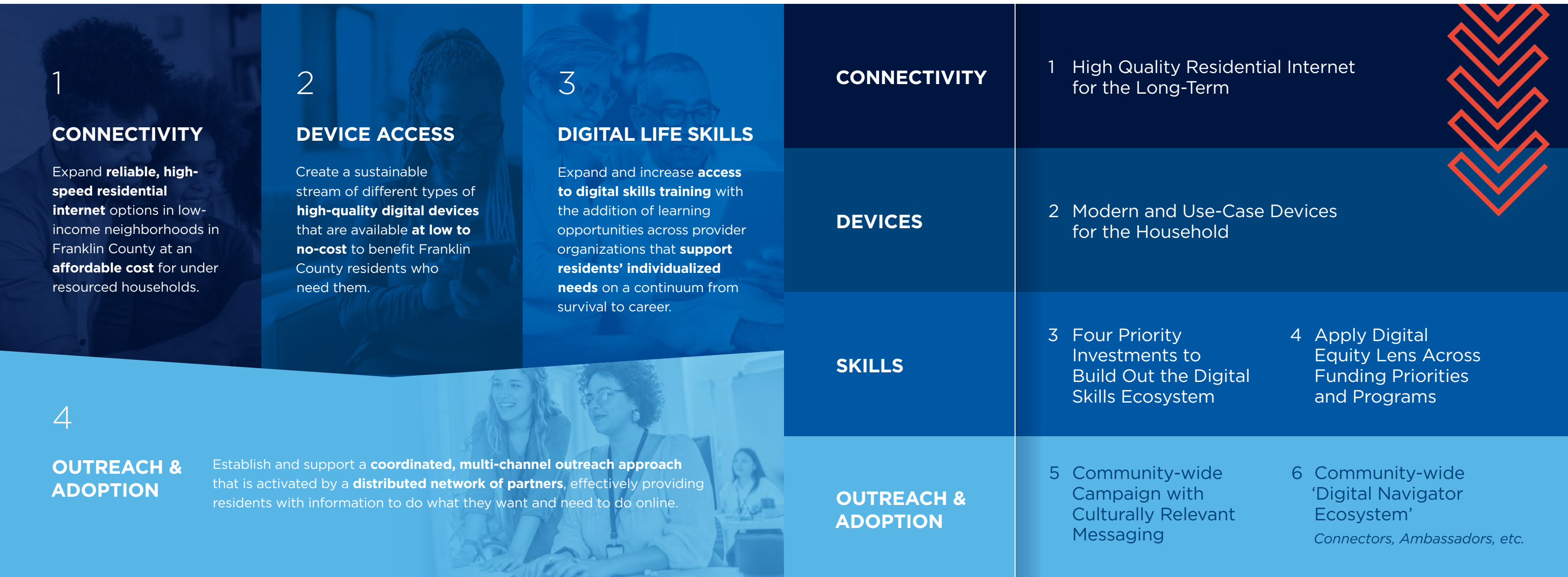
EXECUTION & MEASUREMENT PLAN

Execution of the implementation plan, resulting in realization of the vision and delivery of goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This Agenda is organized around **four broad and interrelated priorities.**

Underlining these priorities are **6 key initiatives to address the digital divide:**



COLLECTIVE GOALS

The recommendations in this Action Agenda work to achieve the following goals:

- **Meet today's standard now** with 100/100 Mbps as a modern day, minimally acceptable broadband speed, available by 2024 to under-resourced residents at a cost below 1% of their income.
- **Simultaneously, future-proof infrastructure by 2027** to ensure broadband infrastructure can deliver a minimum of 1 Gbps X 1 Gbps broadband service across the county by 2027 and at a price point for under-resourced residents that is no more than 1% of their income.
- **Promote a competitive environment** ensuring market forces produce multiple providers capable of delivering robust, competitively priced, and profitable broadband solutions meeting or exceeding 1 Gbps X 1 Gbps service.
- **Overall, reduce the number of households without a residential Internet subscription by 50%.**
- **Increase the number of households paying less than 1% of their income** for Internet connectivity, with a **60% adoption rate of eligible residents enrolled in ACP by 2026.**
- **Distribute at least 20,000 new computing devices by 2026 to households in need.**
- **Incrementally increase digital skill confidence and attainment** across population segments within under-resourced communities.

IMPACT

By achieving these goals, residents will be empowered to advance themselves educationally, economically, physically, and socially. The DEC believes that significant progress can be made by implementing the recommendations made in this document, directly affecting 25,000 under-resourced residents in Franklin County.

Digital equity is key to reducing systemic inequities and driving prosperity. Progress toward closing the digital divide will benefit residents, the community and the economy.



For the **RESIDENT**

Expands opportunities and reduces inequities for individuals

- » Provides better access to basic needs in the modern world
- » Increases access to education and job opportunities, unlocking greater societal inclusion
- » Increases economic potential—students with reliable Internet access make \$2M+ more over their lifetime



For the **COMMUNITY**

Unlocks benefits across the community and society

- » Establishes upskilling, training, and new ways of learning in education through digital curriculum and skills building
- » Enables a more inclusive remote and hybrid workforce
- » Increases telehealth access, expands digital government, and supports a hybrid justice system



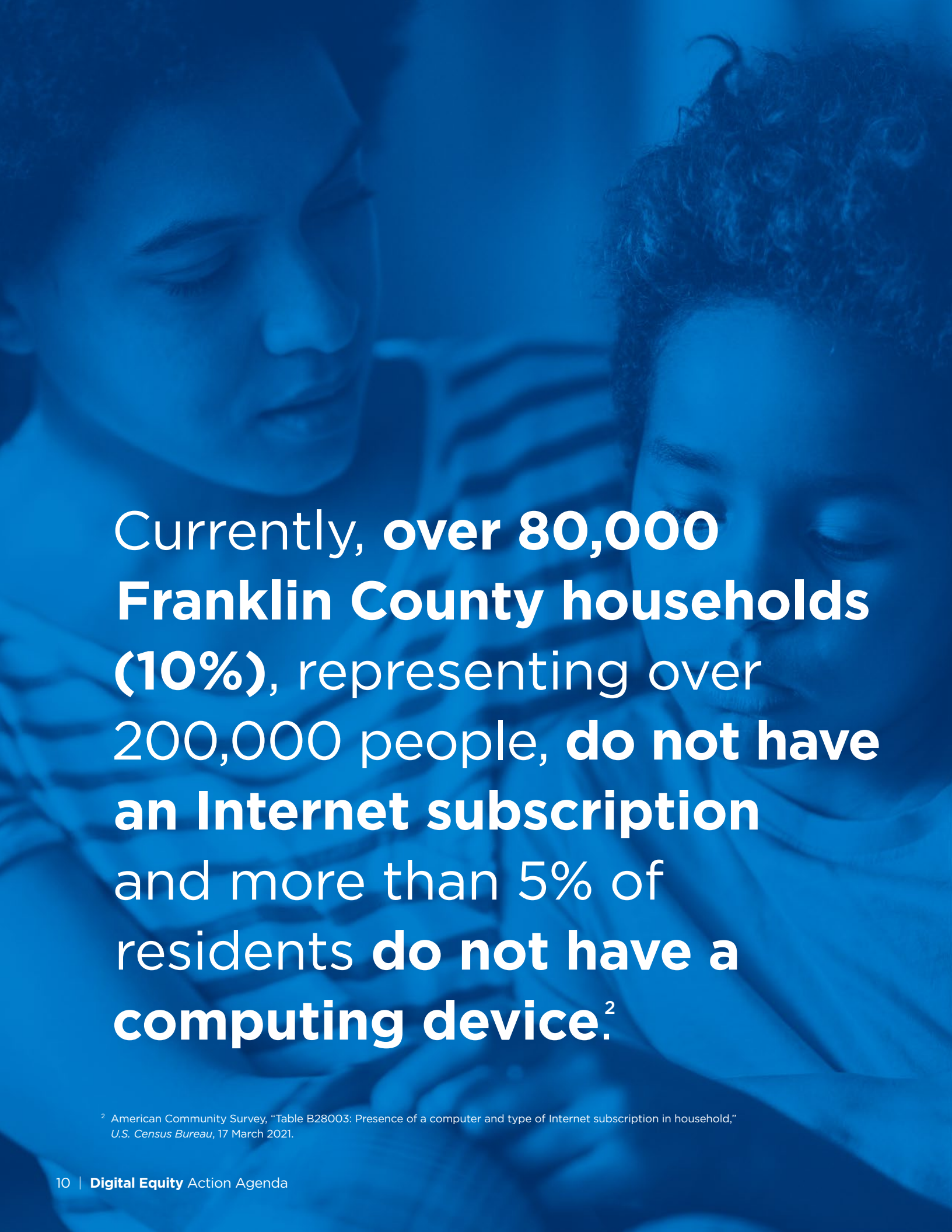
For the **ECONOMY**

Generates a positive return on investment for the economy

- » May create social return on investment for every dollar invested in digital equity
Ramsey County, Minnesota's TechPak partnership estimated a \$2.40 social ROI for every \$1 invested in digital access, achieved through increased earnings, education due to gains in digital skills, increased educational attainment, and improved school outcomes for children with access to a computer¹
- » The presence of ultra-fast broadband leads to 3% average increase in new businesses formation


In a recent survey conducted by the Franklin County Department of Jobs and Family Services (JFS), over three-quarters of respondents expressed the belief that **home Internet is as vital as rent, food, and transportation.**

¹Ecotone Analytics GBC and Ramsey County Investment and Support Efforts, "Closing the digital equity gap by providing technology tools, training and support," *Ramsey County*, January 5, 2021.



Currently, **over 80,000 Franklin County households (10%)**, representing over 200,000 people, **do not have an Internet subscription** and more than 5% of residents **do not have a computing device.**²

Who is Most Affected?



Under-resourced and underserved households & neighborhoods in Franklin County **at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line.**

The Franklin County Digital Equity Framework published in 2021 states, “The digital divide is often framed as a challenge faced primarily by rural areas, yet minorities in urban communities face similar challenges affording, obtaining, and maintaining residential broadband access. Minority communities are especially vulnerable to the impacts from a lack of broadband access, devices, digital literacy, and technical support.”

A few months later the Brookings Institute published an online article titled, “The benefits and costs of broadband expansion.” This article not only corroborates the framework’s assertion, but also gives it scale, citing in absolute terms that three times as many urban households lack broadband versus those in rural areas. While acknowledging those in urban areas typically have physical access to broadband networks, the article points out that, for many, service is unaffordable. For lower-income neighborhoods of color, the expansion of reliable, robust, and affordable Internet connectivity may well help address racial and socioeconomic inequities that have existed for decades.

Franklin County has residents in both rural and urban conditions who face similar and sometimes unique digital divide issues. This Agenda has been developed with specific focus on benefiting households and individuals who live below 200% of the federal poverty level. The Agenda’s objectives and strategies are also intended to be implemented with special emphasis on, and cultural relevance with, eight specific groups, each that have unique digital equity needs. These include the following:

² American Community Survey, “Table B28003: Presence of a computer and type of Internet subscription in household,” U.S. Census Bureau, 17 March 2021.

DEMOGRAPHIC TO BENEFIT

DIGITAL EQUITY CONNECTION

Historically Underrepresented Populations	Those who have been denied access and/or suffer from systemic discrimination.	A 2016 report by the advocacy group Free Press found that systemic racial discrimination across multiple industries (including banking, housing, and credit) contributed to disparities in Internet access and adoption. ³
Housing Insecure	Those who are experiencing one of several different dimensions of accommodation problems, including affordability, safety, quality, insecurity, and homelessness.	Homeless youth engaged by The Columbus Foundation validated the essential nature of the Internet as each person was highly dependent on their phones for navigation and well-being. Inclusive strategies that enable connectivity beyond the home can help people stay connected.
Older Adults	Individuals who are 65 years of age or older.	Older adults must also be included in digital access efforts. In fact, older adults without access are more likely to experience a worrisome trend of isolation and loneliness. ⁴
Veterans	Those who served in the active military, naval, or air service.	During a recent interview with Secretary Denis R. McDonough, U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, stated many veterans live in rural areas and have limited access to healthcare in those communities. The use of telehealth options are one of the many ways that veterans are able to access care regardless of where they live. ⁵
Disabled	Defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.	In 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor conducted two surveys and found that throughout 2019 and 2020, “workers with disabilities that had some form of internet subscription at home stayed employed at far higher rates than workers with disabilities who did not have an internet subscription at home.” ⁶
Students	Those engaged in PreK-12, vocational or trade school, and higher education.	The “homework gap” as defined by the Senate Joint Economic Committee accounts for students disproportionately affected by lack of device access, skills and connectivity enabling them to complete their homework and learn online. ⁷ The pandemic illuminated more connectivity issues. As of 2021, 9 in 10 U.S. parents report that their children have had some online instruction since the pandemic and of those respondents 30% said it has been very or somewhat difficult to help their children use digital tools. Parents with lower and middle incomes reported higher instances of difficulty. In particular, 37% of lower income parents report that their child had to complete homework on their cell phone and 25% reported students were unable to complete their homework due to no access to a computer at home. ⁸

³ Turner, S. Derek. “Digital Denied: The Impact of Systemic Racial Discrimination on Home-Internet Adoption” *Free Press*, 12 December 2016.

⁴ Fields, Jessica. “We are leaving older adults out of the digital world.” *TechCrunch*, 5 May 2019.

⁵ Veterans Health Administration Office of Connected Care. “Connecting Veterans to Telehealth Care.” *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, September 2021.

⁶ “Disability and the Digital Divide: Internet Subscriptions, Internet Use and Employment Outcomes.” *U.S. Department of Labor*, June 2022.

⁷ Joint Economic Committee. “America’s Digital Divide.” *U.S. Congress*, 2 September 2017.

⁸ Schaeffer, Katherine. “What we know about online learning and the homework gap amid the pandemic.” *Pew Research Center*, 1 October 2021.

Justice Involved	Those who have had interactions with the criminal justice system as a defendant.	“Lack of access [to internet and devices] leads to missed court appearances, inability to confer with counsel before life-altering legal proceedings and decisions, isolation from democratic processes, and inability to receive critical government services and safety information.” ⁹
New Americans, Immigrants and Migrant Families	An individual in the U.S. who is aspiring to take the Path to U.S. Citizenship, or who has, in the recent past, become a naturalized citizen of the United States of America.	“Although New Americans account for about one-sixth of U.S. workers, they make up more than one-third of the workforce without digital skills.” ¹⁰ Statements like this not only highlight the need to invest in New Americans, but point to the impending danger if we don’t. Having a workforce trained in digital skills is necessary to grow our economy.

⁹ Samuelson Law, Technology & Public Policy Clinic at UC Berkeley School of Law. “Cut Off From the Courthouse: How the Digital Divide Impacts Access to Justice and Civic Engagement.” *Next Century Cities*, 4 March 2022.

¹⁰ Cherewka, Alexis. “The Digital Divide Hits U.S. Immigrant Households Disproportionately during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Migration Policy Institute*, 3 September 2020.

DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON BLACK & BROWN COMMUNITIES¹¹

- ➔ Those with lower incomes, people of color, and the less formally educated are disproportionately excluded from digital life.
- ➔ Households identified as making less than \$35,000 per year comprise a little over a quarter of all residences yet they constitute over 64% of those without an Internet subscription.
- ➔ Households self-identified as Black or African American alone constitute 22.5% of Franklin County’s population. Over 13% of this population is without a computer or a broadband Internet subscription. Hispanic or Latino households make up 5.7% of the population. More than one in ten (12.3%) do not have a computer or broadband Internet subscription.
- ➔ This compares to Non-Hispanic Whites composing 62.2% of the population where only 6.1% are without a computer or broadband Internet subscription. Those without a high school diploma or equivalent are five times more likely to be without an Internet subscription than individuals who have a college education.

¹¹ American Community Survey, “Table CP05: Comparative Demographic Estimates,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, 17 March 2022.

Summary

The following provides a high-level summary of the estimated impact, cost, and expected benefits of the four priorities and the 11 strategies that comprise this Agenda. Also included is the identification of the parties expected to lead on each strategy. Icons used in the legend to the right are used to convey this information in the matrix shown below.

“Projected Impact on Digital Equity” represents the expected effect each strategy will have on Franklin County’s efforts to reduce the number of households reporting a lack of residential Internet, modern computing devices, or the skills needed to use them.

“Estimated Cost” communicates a relative assessment of how expensive each strategy will be.

LEGEND

Projected Impact on Digital Equity

- Limited
- Moderate
- Considerable
- Expansive

Estimated Cost

- \$ Low
- \$\$ Medium
- \$\$\$ High
- \$\$\$\$ Very High

Lead Organization

- City / County** City & County Government
- PMO** Project Management Office
- PMO/RFP** Project Management Office via Request for Proposal
- PPP** Public-Private Partnership

FRANKLIN COUNTY Digital Equity Action Agenda

PRIORITY 1 - OUTREACH & ADOPTION	PROJECTED IMPACT	ESTIMATED COST	LEAD ORG.
Community-Wide Messaging and Awareness Campaign	●●●●	\$\$\$\$	PMO
Online Digital Inclusion Resource Portal and Internet Optimization Tool	●●●●	\$\$\$	PMO / RFP
Community-Wide “Digital Navigator Ecosystem”	●●●●	\$\$\$	PMO / RFP
Community Co-Design Program	●●●●	\$	PMO

PRIORITY 2 - CONNECTIVITY	PROJECTED IMPACT	ESTIMATED COST	LEAD ORG.
Build Out Fiber to the Home (FTTH)	●●●●	\$\$\$\$	City/County, PPP
Support Connectivity Improvements Across Franklin County	●●●●	\$	PMO

PRIORITY 3 - DEVICE ACCESS	PROJECTED IMPACT	ESTIMATED COST	LEAD ORG.
Collective Purchasing of New and Used Devices	●●●●	\$	PMO / RFP
Flagship Device Distribution Points	●●●●	\$\$\$\$	PMO / RFP
Tech Support Services	●●●●	\$	PMO / RFP

PRIORITY 4 - DIGITAL LIFE SKILLS	PROJECTED IMPACT	ESTIMATED COST	LEAD ORG.
Four Priority Investments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Tech Goes Home • Expand summer tech programs for youth • Provide financial support for residents upskilling • Establish a new competitive grant program 	●●●●	\$\$\$	PMO / RFP
Apply a Digital Equity Lens Across Existing Funding Priorities & Programs	●●●●	\$	PMO



“I don’t know what I am paying for in my plan, they are just buy buy buy and they don’t explain anything.”

–Mother of 5 near OSU East, looking for employment and paying more than \$50 a month for internet.

Fourteen residents participated in a week long engagement to analyze their connectivity experiences, **all but one expressed distrust with Internet Service Providers.**

PRIORITY 1

Outreach & Adoption



Establish and support a coordinated, **multi-channel outreach approach** that is **activated by a distributed network of partners**, effectively providing residents with information to do what they want and need to do online.

This priority will establish and support a coordinated, multi-channel outreach approach activated by a distributed network of partners who transparently provide residents with culturally relevant information that promotes engagement and adoption of solutions in all three major areas of the plan—connectivity, devices, and digital life skills.

Actions Today

GET THE WORD OUT

A coordinated multi-channel marketing and PR campaign activated across a broad spectrum of grass-roots and social service organizations.

CREATE AN ONLINE RESOURCE FOR 24/7 SUPPORT

A one-stop-shop online resource that connects residents and full-time professionals to information they need.

ENSURE THERE ARE PEOPLE AVAILABLE TO HELP

An ecosystem of people prepared to provide in person or on the phone support to residents across the County.

DESIGN PROGRAMS WITH RESIDENTS

Outcomes by 2028

RESIDENTIAL CONNECTIVITY

60% of eligible residents are enrolled in ACP

DEVICE ACCESS

Over 20,000 new devices have been distributed

SKILLS TRAINING

Over 5,000 residents annually receive digital skills training



All of the strategies and activities in this priority work to achieve adoption across the other priorities



ENSURE THERE ARE TRAINED PEOPLE TO HELP

Creation of a community-wide **‘Digital Navigator Ecosystem’** made up of people across the ecosystem who are enlisted to assist residents in getting access to what they want and need to get online.

Community-Wide ‘Digital Navigator Ecosystem’

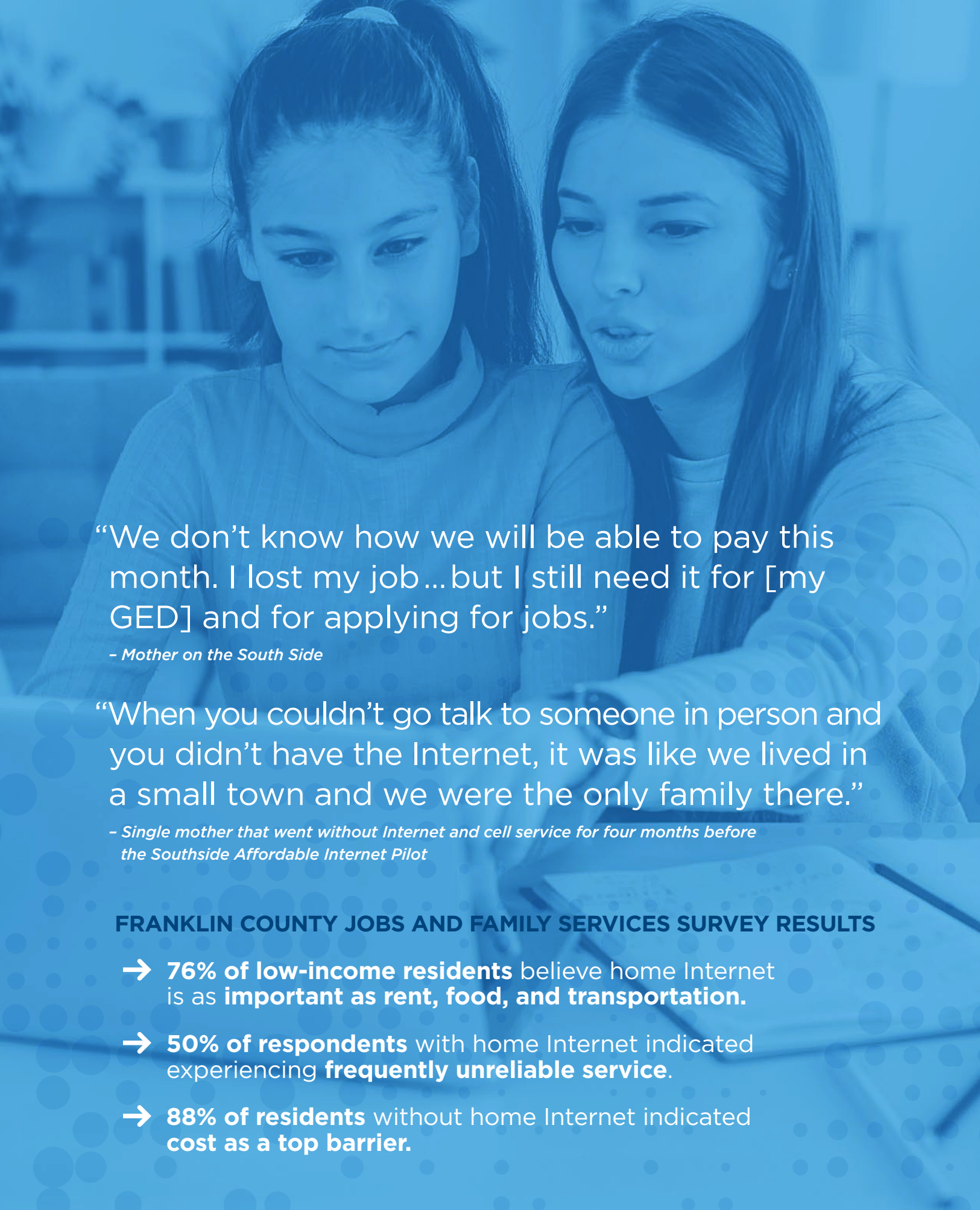
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	
Community-Wide Training	Anchor Institution Referral Network	Embedded Support Network	Resident Ambassador Network
<p>Digital Advocates- Deliver workshops, equipping front line workforce across hundreds of social service, education, government, and other entities with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to help those they serve bridge the digital divide. (Ex: Certified Tourism Ambassador Program)</p>	<p>Digital Connectors- Engage 10 anchor institutions to cross-train their team to assess and identify need, promote access programs, and refer/connect residents to the digital navigation support that will best help them. (Pilots occurring this year at Library, CMHA, and OhioHealth)</p>	<p>Digital Coaches- Engage 10 organizations with embedded/ dedicated digital connectors, customizing digital inclusion services to the populations they serve; share lessons learned with other connectors. (Pilots occurring this year at Library, Jewish Family Services, and Goodwill)</p>	<p>Supported by a grassroots network (Ex: Moms2Be)</p>
<p>Central Support Tools- Develop baseline content, optimize for shared resources across navigator programs including a common ticketing and resource system that records and monitors service fulfillment. (Ex: Charlotte)</p>			

CASE STUDY

COTA's transition to mobile fair payment has increased access, cost savings, and convenience for the majority of riders. The initial challenges residents have experienced in using the technology, as documented by COTA, highlight the need for in person support. COTA randomly surveyed 90 of their riders who came into their customer experience center, of which only 61% had a smartphone and access to a home computer. A summary of the accessibility challenges that have caused longer customer service engagements include:*

- ➔ Some customers only use their phone for calls and do not know how to navigate to the app store.
- ➔ Seniors may need more time to transition and will benefit from more targeted training. COTA hosted several trainings at various nursing homes, both virtually and at their offices.
- ➔ Some customers have a smartphone, but they do not have a data plan. This makes using the Transit app impractical. As a mitigation, COTA offers a COTA Smartcard.
- ➔ Some customers who are not as tech savvy need assistance with navigating the multiple step process, this takes one-on-one time.
- ➔ When customers call in to inquire about the new way to pay, those calls take longer because explaining technical information or fare capping is more complex than answering ‘where is my bus?’

* Insights provided by COTA



PRIORITY 2 Connectivity



Expand **reliable, high-speed residential Internet** options in low-income neighborhoods in Franklin County at an **affordable cost** for under-resourced households.

This priority encourages leveraging the 1,000 miles of dark fiber owned and operated by the City of Columbus to form a public-private partnership that results in the delivery of affordable, reliable, high-speed Internet connectivity to low-income neighborhoods. The priority also encourages efforts to increase competition and transparency in the existing environment to lower price points for residents and encourage continued investments by existing ISPs to upgrade their infrastructure in Franklin County.

This priority's objectives seek to solve three problems simultaneously:

- 1 Affordability of residential Internet,
- 2 inadequate Internet speeds, and
- 3 the number of under-resourced Columbus and Franklin County families living without residential Internet (estimated 80,000).

“We don’t know how we will be able to pay this month. I lost my job...but I still need it for [my GED] and for applying for jobs.”

- Mother on the South Side

“When you couldn’t go talk to someone in person and you didn’t have the Internet, it was like we lived in a small town and we were the only family there.”

- Single mother that went without Internet and cell service for four months before the Southside Affordable Internet Pilot

FRANKLIN COUNTY JOBS AND FAMILY SERVICES SURVEY RESULTS

- **76% of low-income residents** believe home Internet is as **important as rent, food, and transportation.**
- **50% of respondents** with home Internet indicated experiencing **frequently unreliable service.**
- **88% of residents** without home Internet indicated **cost as a top barrier.**

Key Milestones

- 1 **IMPROVE THE EXISTING MARKET**
- 2 **BRING FIBER TO THE HOME TO LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS**

2023 - 2026

Promote ACP and Encourage Infrastructure Upgrades

Build out Middle Mile and Form PPP

2027+

Central Support System

First Customers receive Fiber to the Home Service in Low-Income Neighborhoods

“I have to use the library’s computers which means they’re **not readily available and limited time usage.** Having a computer with internet would enhance my life.”

- JFS Survey Respondent

The American Community Survey shows 5.7% of Franklin County households have no computing device at all and an additional 8.1% have only a smartphone. This means over 110,000 Franklin County households do not have a laptop, desktop, tablet, or other type of computing device from which residents can easily engage in what many would describe as minimum entry requirements for digital life.¹²

¹² American Community Survey, “Table B28003: Presence of a computer and type of Internet subscription in household,” U.S. Census Bureau, 17 March 2021.

PRIORITY 3 Device Access



Create a sustainable stream of different types of **high-quality digital devices** that are available **at low to no-cost** to benefit Franklin County residents who need them.

The lack of adequate devices impedes one’s ability to advance educationally, obtain public services, engage in online commerce, compete on a level playing field for employment, or take advantage of digital healthcare services.

Objectives and strategies of this priority were developed with these considerations in mind:

- » New devices are more equitable than used.
- » There are few digital device vendors and/or refurbishers located in Franklin County that cater to low-income residents.
- » While Franklin County residents can purchase devices through several online sites that offer discounts to qualifying individuals, the scarcity of such entities with a physical presence is a barrier for many potential users, especially those lacking the skills or comfort with online commerce.
- » Devices should be given to households with the requisite skills training and therefore integrated with priority four’s strategy of establishing the ‘Tech Goes Home’ training program in Franklin County.
- » Purchasing and distributing new devices in bulk also would help streamline technology skills training and support for fewer types of devices rather than supporting a patchwork of different donated equipment.
- » There is a large need for a wide range of device types and features that can enable residents to take advantage of opportunities in today’s digital economy.

“The new computer is quite literally a godsend, as we did not have technology like that at home for her.”

- Mother of a child who attended CCAD STEM Camp and received a device through a grant from the City of Columbus

USE CASE	DEVICE TYPE & FEATURES	STANDARD	SIZE OF THE PROBLEM ^{13,14}
Daily Life & Basic Survival	Smart Phones	iOS and Android operating systems capable of running apps required to take advantage of transportation and banking applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.6% of Franklin County households don't have a smartphone • Unknown how many residents don't have current OS capable devices
Education (K-Higher Ed)	Chromebooks/iPads Pre-K - Touchscreen	New Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46,500 amount of CCS students and 40,000 Franklin County students in K-12 (outside of CCS) on free and reduced lunch
	Higher Capability Laptops	New or Used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 106,204 College students in Franklin County
Workforce Development & On-the-Job Needs	More powerful software-capable devices and supporting accessories	40% New and 60% Used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce and/or tech training programs reach 1,900 residents a year
Telehealth & Disabled Needs	Touchscreen, Tablets and Wearables	80% New and 20% Used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 157,000 seniors (65+) in Franklin County • Monthly use of Medicaid's telehealth services grew by 35X in Ohio in 2020 • 149,130 disabled residents in Franklin County



¹³ Bureau, U. S. C. (n.d.). *COMPARATIVE SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS IN THE UNITED STATE*. Explore census data. Retrieved June 9, 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=United+States&t=Education&g=0500000US39049&d=ACS+5-Year+Estimates+Comparison+Profiles&tid=ACSCP5Y2020.CP02>

¹⁴ *One year after expansion, Medicaid providers and their patients...* - Ohio. (n.d.). Retrieved June 9, 2022, from <https://medicaid.ohio.gov/news/press-release/03-24-2021-one-year-after-expansion-medicaid-providers-and-their-patients-continue-to-embrace-telehealth>

DISTRIBUTION OF DEVICES THROUGH:

- » Distributed upon completion of basic Skills Training program (i.e. Tech goes Home)
- » Integrated distribution through programs with healthcare institutions, workforce development programs, etc.
- » Distributed on a need basis through anchor institutions such as libraries, Jobs and Family Services, schools and higher education institutions

New, modern devices are **essential** to using important online tools.



COTA recently transitioned to mobile fare payment as a way to access and pay for transportation. Insights from their roll out showed that many residents had challenges with the quality of their devices:

- ➔ Some customers have government-issued phones that may not have the latest operating system. Certain operating systems did not appear compatible with the latest version of Transit App.

PRIORITY 4

Digital Life Skills



Expand and increase **access to digital skills training** with the addition of learning opportunities across provider organizations that **support residents' individualized needs** on a continuum from survival to career.

This priority is crucial because access to devices and the Internet is not enough to close the digital divide; residents also need to know how to access what they want and need online. Digital life skills and abilities are essential to promoting online safety and security, gaining objective information, making social connections, advancing education, engaging in the modern economy, increasing workforce competitiveness, and accessing healthcare services.

Across the three levels of skills training, the Digital Equity Coalition recommends three new priority investments, as well as the creation of a competitive grant fund to spur innovation in tailoring digital skills training to seniors, disabled, justice involved, and new American populations.

“Someone teaching should be approachable and patient.

The learner may not have basic skills so patience is key.”

- New American from Digital Navigator Sprint

“There’s not a one size solution for all; we must be willing to customize to the unique needs of our community/population.”

- Resident Co-Designer

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
	Intro to Using Tech in My Life <i>Devices & Usage</i> <i>Email & Messaging</i> <i>Social Media</i> <i>Banking</i> <i>Community Resources</i> <i>Safety & Privacy</i>	Using Tech in My Life <i>Telehealth</i> <i>Social Media</i> <i>Banking</i> <i>Community Resources</i> <i>Safety & Privacy</i>	Using Tech in Work & Career <i>Career Exploration</i> <i>Education & Training</i> <i>Credentials</i> <i>Employment Opportunities</i> <i>Productivity Software</i> <i>Safety & Privacy</i>
Under-Resourced Residents		PRIORITY 1 Establish Tech Goes Home Training Program	
K-12 Students			PRIORITY 2 Expand Summer STEM Programming and tech training in summer employment for Franklin County youth
Adult Workers			PRIORITY 3 Provide payment for those who complete and/or participate in tech skills training
Seniors			PRIORITY 4
Disabled, Justice Involved, New Americans	Establish competitive grant fund to support inclusive training programs that meet the unique needs of the group		

Intersectional Execution

The priorities and strategies are inter-related, below is a future story of the various ways a resident will benefit from the ecosystem of solutions and support that is architected in this Action Agenda.

Naomi has a good relationship with her Jobs and Family Services case manager and feels comfortable disclosing that she is not sure how she will pay her Internet bill next month. Because her case manager was cross-trained as a **'Digital Connector,'** Naomi is immediately supported with information about how to enroll and qualify for free Internet through the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** as well as information about how to access support in the future from **'Digital Coaches.'** While completing the application, she experiences a few challenges uploading the required documents. She calls the **'Digital Coach'** at the Columbus Metropolitan Library who helps her convert a tax document into a PDF and upload it to successfully complete her application.

A month into ACP, her **'Digital Coach'** from the Library follows up with her to check in on her experience. Through this conversation the **'Digital Coach'** walks her through an **Internet optimization simulation** that indicates she needs to move her router to a more ideal location to support streaming. Naomi takes an interest in continuing to learn more and **enrolls in the Tech Goes Home program.**

At her Neighborhood Library branch, Naomi completed 15 hours of **digital skills training through the Tech Goes Home program** and **received a new computing device** for her family. With the increased confidence in her digital skills, she **joins the Resident Ambassador network** to help others in her community.

When **fiber Internet service** was introduced in her neighborhood through a partnership with the City of Columbus and Franklin County, she was one of the first to enroll and spread the word to her neighbors.



Naomi realizes she can't pay her internet bill.

Through her case manager, a Digital Connector, she learns about the ACP.

She also learns how to access future support from a Digital Coach.

From her Digital Coach she learns about and enrolls in the Tech Goes Home program.

After her digital training she receives a new computing device.

She also joins the Resident Ambassador network and spreads the word to other residents.

Digital Equity Coalition

This Agenda was developed and will be championed by the Franklin County Digital Equity Coalition (DEC), a dedicated group of over 30 Franklin County and regional organizations, representing government, education, healthcare, social service, private sectors and institutions. The Coalition initially formed in response to the pandemic in March 2020.

Founded by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Council (MORPC), Columbus Metropolitan Library, and The Columbus Foundation, a number of Franklin County organizations began participating in informal, virtual meetings to more closely examine the status of broadband challenges for area residents. Over time, this organic gathering has grown to include additional business, government, education, nonprofit and social sector representatives. The DEC has been a model for civic cooperation and collaboration. The DEC is now coordinated by Smart Columbus and continues to meet several times each month. The momentum for this collective effort continues to increase.

Access to modern digital **devices** and attainment of digital **skills** are needed to take full advantage of the internet and **enable digital equity.**





FRANKLIN COUNTY
DIGITAL EQUITY COALITION