

RCW 43.330.539 Broadband office—Digital equity plan. (1) The office, in consultation with the digital equity forum, the utilities and transportation commission, and the department of social and health services, must develop a state digital equity plan.

(a) The office must seek any available federal funding for purposes of developing and implementing the state digital equity plan.

(b) The state digital equity plan must include such elements as the office determines are necessary to leverage federal funding.

(2) In developing the plan, the office must identify measurable objectives for documenting and promoting digital equity among underserved communities located in the state.

(3) By December 1, 2023, the office must submit a report to the governor and the appropriate committees of the legislature, including the following:

(a) The digital equity plan described in subsection (1) of this section and measurable objectives described in subsection (2) of this section;

(b) A description of how the office collaborated with the membership of the digital equity forum, state agencies, and key stakeholders to develop the plan including, but not limited to, the following:

(i) Community anchor institutions;

(ii) Local governments;

(iii) Local educational agencies;

(iv) Entities that carry out workforce development programs; and

(v) Broadband service providers;

(c) A description of federal funding available to advance digital equity in the state, including any available information on the extent to which state residents have enrolled in the affordable connectivity program through an approved provider; and

(d) Recommendations of additional state law or policy that can be targeted to help improve broadband adoption and affordability for state residents. This may include recommendations of ongoing subsidies that the state can provide to low-income individuals and anchor institutions, as well as identification of revenue sources that other states or jurisdictions have developed to fund such subsidies or discounted rates.

(4) For the purpose of this section, "office" means the statewide broadband office established in RCW 43.330.532. [2022 c 265 § 201.]

Short title—2022 c 265: "This act may be known and cited as the digital equity act." [2022 c 265 § 101.]

Findings—Intent—2022 c 265: "(1) The legislature finds that:

(a) Access to the internet is essential to participating in modern day society including, but not limited to, attending school and work, accessing health care, paying for basic services, connecting with family and friends, civic participation, and economic survival.

(b) For too many people in both rural and urban areas, the cost of being online is unaffordable. The legislature recognizes that building the last mile of broadband to the home is prohibitively expensive and that urban areas that are home to people earning low incomes continue to face digital redlining. Across the state there is a lack of affordable plans, barriers to enrolling in appropriate broadband plans, and barriers to fully utilize the opportunities that broadband offers.

(c) The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for affordable access, devices, and skills to use the internet.

(d) The need for more accessible and affordable internet is felt more acutely among specific sectors of the population, especially Washington residents in rural areas, people who are currently earning low incomes, seniors and others who lack the skills necessary to get online, people with first languages other than English, immigrant communities, and people with disabilities.

(e) The federal government is allocating considerable sums for investment in digital equity that the state broadband office will help to leverage for residents across Washington. Continued comprehensive efforts, including coordination with tribal partners, are needed to ensure truly equitable access. The legislature recognizes that there will be a need for ongoing development and maintenance of broadband infrastructure. The legislature also recognizes that there is a need for ongoing outreach by community-based partnerships to provide enrollment assistance to lower the cost of internet subscriptions and devices.

(2) Therefore, the legislature intends to broaden access to the internet, the appropriate devices, and the skills to operate online safely and effectively so that all people in Washington can fully participate in our society, democracy, and economy by expanding assistance and support programs offered in the state and establishing the governor's statewide broadband office as a central access point to such programs." [2022 c 265 § 102.]