



BROADBAND-PP-01: STATE DIGITAL EQUITY GRANTS

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: ADOPT

PROPOSED POLICY: FAC SUPPORTS funding for State Digital Equity grants to include digital navigator programs at the local level.

BACKGROUND: The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) benefit program that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more.

The benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price.

A household is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program if the household income is at or below 200% of the [Federal Poverty Guidelines](#), or if a member of the household meets at least *one* of the criteria below:

- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income internet program;
- Participates in one of these assistance programs:
 - The National School Lunch Program or the School Breakfast Program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision;
 - SNAP
 - Medicaid
 - Federal Public Housing Assistance
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - WIC
 - Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits
 - or [Lifeline](#);
- Participates in one of these assistance programs and lives on [Qualifying Tribal lands](#):
 - Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance
 - Tribal TANF
 - Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
 - Tribal Head Start (income based)

Digital Navigators are individuals who address the whole digital inclusion process — home connectivity, devices, and digital skills — with community members through repeated interactions.



Navigators can be volunteers or cross-trained staff who already work in social service agencies, libraries, health, and more who offer remote and socially distant in-person guidance. Often at trusted community-based organizations, Digital Navigators are familiar with resources that relate to digital equity, and they help residents learn to use critical online services that provide guidance with food support, rent, education, employment, childcare, government benefits and more. They recommend resources and check back with the client.

Source: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/digital-navigator-model/>

ANALYSIS: The federal grants are provided directly to the respective state broadband office. Each office then develops a state Digital Equity Grant Plan, which may include provisions for Digital Navigators. The Department of Economic Opportunity's [Florida Strategic Plan on Broadband](#) specifies that it will coordinate funding programs with components meant to address adoption and use of broadband internet service (Strategy 19). The Plan commits to focusing at least a portion of state-level digital equity grant administration efforts on broadband Internet education and training programs, raising awareness of broadband Internet-based applications, and providing equipment to schools, libraries, colleges and universities, health care points of access, housing providers, and community support organizations to assist with digital literacy efforts. In terms of digital literacy funds that are known to be available, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has made \$2.75 billion available nationwide for three Digital Equity Act Programs. Those funds are to be used to “ensure that all individuals and communities have the opportunity to acquire the same skills, technology, and capacity needed to engage in the Nation’s digital economy” (NTIA, 2022b, para. 7). For grant application purposes, state and local datasets should include demographic information that federal agencies will seek, such as the racial or ethnic characteristics of the people surveyed and residence information with which to identify whether they live in urban or rural areas.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Affordable Connectivity Program lowers costs for eligible households. The State of Florida Digital Equity Plan could devote a portion of its program to digital navigator plans at the local level, providing savings to households across the state of Florida.

FAC STAFF NOTES:

- FAC 2022 Policy Conference
 - BROADBAND-PP-03 was recommended for adoption by the committee.

Florida Eligibility for ACP Benefits:



“I would say a lot of people in our area will qualify,” said Jeff Hayward, president and CEO of the [Heart of Florida United Way](#), which has calculated that fewer than half of households in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties earn enough to cover basic housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, technology and taxes. In 2020, nearly 93,000 tri-county households lived below the federal poverty line.” (<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-ne-new-federal-program-can-make-internet-service-free-20220208-mwxp6bsltbdqlg7s7apym7jpuu-story.html>)

- Florida Providers: <https://www.fcc.gov/affordable-connectivity-program-providers#Florida>
- [EBB Former program for Broadband Subsidy—CARES Act](#)
- Statutes
 - Federal [Public Law 117–58](#)—NOV. 15, 2021 (H.R. 3684- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act)
 - Established the ACP
 - Affordable Connectivity Program support amounts:
 - <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/47/54.1803>
- Past FAC statements & Guiding Principles
 - Guiding Principle FTA 20. The Florida Association of Counties supports increased efforts to promote access to broadband, including competition and innovation in the marketplace, as well as provide resources to support accessibility, speed, and affordability of broadband in Florida.

SUBMITTING COUNTY AND CONTACT: Palm Beach – Gregg Weiss

ASSIGNED COMMITTEE: BROADBAND

BOARD SUPPORT: N/A

UNFUNDED MANDATE: N/A

PROTECTIVE OF HOME RULE: N/A