

Digital Opportunity Case Study Pilot

Program

Application Guidelines



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Background

Access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet, universally across the Commonwealth continues to play a critical and growing role in the ways in which people work, learn, and receive health care. Full digital opportunity – gaining access to broadband uninhibited by barriers of affordability and adoption - is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. Through the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act's Digital Equity Act programs, states will be able to develop a full picture to the barriers broadband access, affordability, and adoption. Governor Youngkin and the General Assembly have designated the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Office of Broadband (DHCD) to lead these efforts.

As part of the development of the statewide Commonwealth Digital Opportunity plan, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is seeking to provide funding to organizations working to close the digital divide to conduct pilot projects addressing gaps in broadband access, affordability or adoption.

Additional guidance and questions regarding this planning grant program and application guidelines should be directed to:

**Tamarah Holmes, Ph.D. Director,
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Digital Opportunity Email Address
digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov

Please refer questions regarding your application submittal through CAMS to
digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov

Program Description

Administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Association (NTIA), the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program is part of the larger State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program, the purpose of which is – as defined by NTIA - to promote the achievement of digital equity, support digital inclusion activities, and build capacity for efforts by States relating to the adoption of broadband by residents of those States

Governor Youngkin and the General Assembly have designated the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development’s Office of Broadband (DHCD) to lead these efforts. DHCD is currently developing the Commonwealth Digital Opportunity Plan. The intent of this program is to bring organizations working to close the digital divide into the state’s planning process. The objective of this grant opportunity is to identify best practices of initiatives/efforts that are addressing the digital divide in communities throughout Virginia. DHCD will provide grant funding to the organizations operating these programs, with the deliverable of a case study highlighting key findings, which DHCD will incorporate into the Commonwealth Digital Opportunity Plan. These case studies will provide real-world examples of efforts throughout the Commonwealth that interact with the covered populations¹, address how the covered populations can be engaged in addressing the digital divide, and chart a possible course for any future implementation funding. These key takeaways will inform the development of the Commonwealth Digital Opportunity Plan.

Eligible Applicants and Partners

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is sub awarding Digital Equity Act Planning Grant funds to organizations in Virginia currently doing work to advance digital opportunity.

Organizations eligible to apply for grant funding from this Program include:

- Community anchor institutions;
- County, municipal, and tribal governments;
- Local educational agencies;
- Nonprofit organizations;
- Organizations that represent
 - Individuals with disabilities, including organizations that represent children with disabilities;
 - Aging Individuals;
 - Individuals with language barriers, including
 - Individuals who are English learners;
 - Individuals who have low levels of literacy;
 - Veterans;
 - Individuals in the State who are incarcerated in facilities other than Federal

¹ Covered Populations, as defined by the National Telecommunications and Information Association in the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity, include: 1. Individuals who live in covered households; 2. Aging individuals; 3. Incarcerated individuals, other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility; 4. Veterans; 5. Individuals with disabilities; 6. Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who - a. Are English learners; and b. Have low levels of literacy; 7. Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group; and 8. Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.

- correctional facilities;
- Civil rights organizations;
- Entities that carry out workforce development programs;
- Agencies of the State that are responsible for administering or supervising adult education and literacy activities in the State;
- Public housing authorities in the State; and
- A partnership between any of the entities described above.

Digital Opportunity Case Study Minimum Requirements

These application guidelines are intended to provide interested organizations a baseline from which to develop an application, without adversely limiting the creativity and wide-ranging scope of the studies themselves. To this end, the minimum requirements of the case study are intentionally limited. This is to encourage a broad array of applicants that represent a diverse set of programs and communities. The case study is required to, at a minimum, contain the following elements:

1. A detailed description of the program that the case study will focus on.
2. A description of the populations the program interacts with, with a particular focus on those populations identified as covered in the Digital Equity Act.
3. An analysis of how the program is closing the digital divide in Virginia.

Application Minimum Requirements

Applications should provide the following information:

1. High level narrative responses to each of the required elements listed above.
2. Requested grant amount, with a justification if the request exceeds \$10,000.
3. A budget with an accompanying narrative.
4. A timeline that demonstrates the organization’s ability to complete and submit the case study on or before August 1st, 2023.

Selection Process

Awardees will be selected through a merit review process on a rolling basis. DHCD reserves the right to revoke an award due to a material misrepresentation. DHCD reserves the right to reject applications or request edits in proposed activities prior to approval. If the total funding request exceeds the funding available, DHCD will conduct a competitive review, based on the following criteria.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Point Value</i>
1. Understanding of the Program: The applicant demonstrates clear understanding of the intent of the grant program in their application.	25
2. Relevance of program to Digital Equity Act: The applicant’s program under study is relevant to the federal grant and interacts with the covered populations.	25

3. Unique contribution to planning effort: The applicant’s case study would constitute a unique addition to the development of the Commonwealth Digital Opportunity plan that would not otherwise be included. 25
4. Timeline and Budget: The applicant has provided the requested materials, and they provide DHCD with sufficient information to ensure timely delivery and adherence the established budget. 25

Total: 100

Technical Assistance, Application Development

DHCD staff is available to provide technical assistance on the development of an application. Please reach out to DHCD staff prior to engaging a private consultant. *DHCD staff strongly recommends engagement of technical assistance throughout application development.*

Project Financing & Funding Amounts

Awarded grant funds may cover up to 100% of the expenses incurred during the development of this plan and pre-approved by DHCD. Grants made under this program are not intended to fully fund the program of interest, but rather to address any costs or burdens incurred by the organization in the development of the plan. DHCD intends the average grant made under this program will be \$10,000. Organizations should specifically justify their need for a larger amount in the application narrative if they wish to request funds in excess of \$10,000.

Application Due Date

Applications will be accepted and evaluated by DHCD on a rolling basis, until **all available funds are committed**. Interested organizations are encouraged to apply as soon as possible to begin development of their case study if selected. Please note that DHCD Offices close at 5:00 p.m. Therefore, staff will not be available to provide CAMS technical assistance after 5:00 p.m.

Case Study Submission Deadline

Organizations must submit their finalized case studies to DHCD on or before August 1, 2023. The project timeline begins with the contract execution between the applicant and DHCD. DHCD will project extensions under significant circumstances, but extensions will not be allowed beyond August 30, 2023.

Centralized Application Management System

DHCD manages all grants through the Centralized Application and Management System

(CAMS). If your organization does not already have a CAMS profile, please register using the “Registration” tab on the [CAMS Home Page](#). DHCD reviews requests according to the order in which they are received and notifies organizations of approval or denial within five business days. The approval of a registration request creates a CAMS profile for the organization by which it can apply for funding.

Once registered, organizations can submit applications for funding. Please reference the [CAMS User Guide](#) on how to submit an application and submit any questions to digitalopportunity@dhcd.virginia.gov.

If your Community Action Agency does not have a CAMS profile, it is recommended that your organization complete registration as soon as possible. Please note that all application questions and required materials are outlined below. Applicants are encouraged to reference these questions and materials and begin their completion, so the information is ready to complete into the CAMS application.

Reporting Requirements & Structure, Reimbursement Structure

Awardees are expected to provide monthly reports in CAMS. Monthly reporting requirements will include, but is not limited to, an overview of the prior month’s activities and a preview of the forthcoming month’s activities.

Requests for reimbursement of grant activities must be submitted through CAMS. Please contact DHCD staff with additional questions on submitting requests for reimbursement.

Public Disclosure of Applications

All forms and supporting documents submitted as part of the application packet will be treated as a material representation of fact upon which DHCD will rely in awarding grants. Applicants should be aware that DHCD may make all or portions of their applications for grants under the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program publicly available. If there are any concerns regarding this public display of forms and supporting documents, please contact DHCD staff.

Additional Federal Requirements

DHCD reserves the right to include additional reporting and compliance requirements during the implementation period based upon requirements imposed by the National Telecommunications and Information Association or National Institute of Standards and Technology.

Anticipated Award Announcement

DHCD anticipates awards will be announced on a rolling basis.

Evaluation Process

DHCD staff will conduct an initial eligibility and administrative screening of submitted applications to ensure that the applicant is eligible to receive funding under the program and has submitted a complete application. Applications not submitted by an eligible applicant will be eliminated from further review. DHCD may continue the review process for an application that is timely submitted by an eligible applicant but that is missing certain information or documentation required by this document. In such cases, DHCD may ask the applicant to provide any missing or incomplete materials during this initial review.

Once an application is deemed eligible and complete, DHCD will conduct a merit review, to be conducted by DHCD staff. The merit review process will review the application to ensure conformity with the program objectives, eligible activities, and related costs/budget. The purpose of this review is to provide information to the technical soundness and merits of the application. During the merit review, DHCD may ask applicants to submit additional information to clarify or to further substantiate the representations made in their applications. In addition, if deficiencies are identified during the merit review, the applicant may be contacted by DHCD and asked to revise the application accordingly.