

Digital Connection Committees: Common Questions

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Background Information

1. What is digital inclusion?

According to the [National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#), digital inclusion describes “the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of [technology].” Digital inclusion includes five components:

- Affordable, robust, consistent broadband internet service
- Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user
- Access to digital skills training
- Quality technical support
- Applications and online content

2. What is the Digital Equity Act?

The Digital Equity Act is a part of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It provides \$2.75B nationally distributed across three grant programs. The two programs Minnesota is utilizing are:

- State Digital Equity Planning Grants: These support states, tribes, and territories in developing digital equity plans. Minnesota is receiving \$881,905.10 through this program. The funding period is December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023. Office of Broadband Development (OBD) is leading this work.
- State Digital Equity Planning Grants: These support states, tribes, and territories in implementing their Digital Equity Plans. Funding amounts have not yet been determined. Minnesota expects to have access to this program in 2024 after the Digital Equity Plan is submitted and approved.

Further information on each of these programs is available through the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#).

3. I live in an area where high-speed internet is ubiquitous. Should I still participate in developing the Digital Equity Plan?

Yes. Even when a place has high-speed internet, people still face challenges in accessing and using technology. These can include barriers like internet affordability, having access to an internet-enabled device, and having adequate digital skills.

Forming a Digital Connection Committee

4. What are Digital Connection Committees?

As OBD develops the Digital Equity Plan to strategize improvements in internet affordability, access to internet-enabled devices, and access to digital skills training, Digital Connection Committees serve as key partners in ensuring the Plan reflects the goals and needs of all Minnesotans. Committees are voluntary workgroups which OBD is supporting.

5. Who can create a Digital Connection Committee?

Digital Connection Committees can be formed by a variety of entities, including political subdivisions, tribes, non-profits, anchor institutions, faith-based organizations, Minnesota-based businesses, and more – or any combination of these. Individuals are also welcome to sit on Digital Connection Committees without being affiliated with a formal organization. Committees representing one or more of the following populations are especially encouraged to participate:

- People age 60 or older
- People who are incarcerated
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- People from low-income households
- People learning to speak or read English
- Black People, Indigenous People, and People of Color
- People living in rural communities

6. Can a group of individuals form a Committee without being affiliated with an organization?

Yes, this is allowed. When registering a Committee, you will be asked to provide an address for your host organization for inclusion in a public directory. If this is a home address, please contact Hannah Buckland at hannah.buckland@state.mn.us to have your address withheld.

7. How many people should be on a Committee? Is my Committee too big? Too small? Does OBD need to know who is on the Committee?

All Committees will be different, so membership is up to you to decide. OBD will not require a minimum or maximum number of Committee members. A Committee can be 1 person; a committee can be 30+ people. OBD will not ask for a roster of Committee members but will ask one member to serve as OBD's primary contact so that information can be exchanged efficiently.

8. How often should my Committee meet? Can we meet virtually? Can we meet in-person?

This is up to you to decide. Please proceed in whatever way works best for you.

9. My organization already has a group whose focus is similar to a Digital Connection Committee. Can we register as we are? Do we need to create a new team just for this?

Yes, you can register an existing group that has a similar focus.

10. I'm on a Committee for my employer, and I've also been asked to join a Committee for a separate organization. Is this allowed?

Yes, this is allowed.

Committee Activities and Responsibilities

11. What do Digital Connection Committees do?

Digital Connection Committees have two **required** responsibilities:

- Receive and share updates about OBD’s digital equity planning process
- Allow OBD to list your Committee in a public directory. This is so Minnesotans statewide can see who is active in their area

Committees have several **optional** responsibilities:

- Gather local information about digital inclusion assets, needs, and goals
 - This information will profoundly shape the Digital Equity Plan
 - By March 31, OBD will provide optional templates, guides, and other resources that Committees may choose to incorporate
- Attend virtual networking sessions to meet and learn from other Committees (April 12 and June 14, times TBD)
- Provide feedback on a draft of the Digital Equity Plan between August 21 and September 29
 - Virtual options: Online survey, Teams meetings
 - In-person options: at one of 12 regional gatherings hosted by OBD in locations across the state. More information forthcoming in July.
- Be a network of partners for OBD to rely on as Digital Equity Act work progresses beyond 2023

12. How much time will we need to spend on Committee work?

This is ultimately up to the Committee to decide. OBD understands that in many cases, Committee activities will be done in addition to already busy workloads. Because of this, we want to emphasize that Committees’ workloads are entirely flexible.

13. You say OBD will provide “templates, guides, and other resources.” What does this mean?

By March 31, OBD will send all Committees some materials they can choose to use in their efforts to collect information about digital inclusion strengths, needs, and goals. At this time, these are under development. Here’s what we’re considering – we are open to feedback:

- Survey templates for Committees to customize and distribute
- Sample questions to use at a focus group or townhall meeting
- Sample language to use in a social media post or local press release
- Clear instructions for how Committees can submit information

14. What kind of information are Committees gathering and submitting?

We are determining this. On one hand, information about demographics—like age ranges, approximate geographic locations, racial identity, and veteran status—will be helpful starting points. At the same time, the personal stories, experiences, and ideas that Minnesotans carry will bring this plan to life.

Collecting information like this depends on a high degree of trust. Committees will inherently hold trust in the communities they serve, trust that we know does not necessarily transfer to OBD or state government at large. To protect individuals and not jeopardize trust between Committees and communities, OBD will not accept any personally identifiable information. OBD also reminds

Committees that they are at liberty to choose what information they want incorporated into the Digital Equity Plan.

15. My Committee already has a lot of information from our past work – datasets, summary reports, maps, etc. Can we just submit this?

Yes, this is welcome.

16. How will Committees submit information?

This answer will come by March 31.

17. What kind of plans do Committees need to be creating?

Committees are not responsible for creating Digital Equity Plans. OBD is developing one statewide Digital Equity Plan, and Committees are contributing data, information, insight, and critique so that the Plan represents Minnesota’s real digital inclusion needs and goals.

18. What funding is available to Committees?

Many Committees will be eligible for non-competitive mini-grants of up to \$4,000. These grants require separate application, due **March 3 by 3:00 p.m.** Application materials are available on OBD’s [digital inclusion webpage](#).

Planning Timeline

19. What is the overall timeline for Minnesota’s Digital Equity Act planning process?

Date	Activity
March 3	Assessing Digital Inclusion Mini-grant applications due by 3:00 p.m.
March 31	OBD begins sending out updates, templates, guides, and other resources to DCCs
April 3	DCC information gathering activities begin; start of performance period for grantees
April 12	Virtual networking session for DCCs
May 1 – 31	OBD holds 1:1 check-ins with grantees (required) and non-grantees (optional)
June 14	Virtual networking session for DCCs
June 30	DCC information gathering activities end; end of performance period for grantees
July 1 – August	OBD develops a draft of the Digital Equity Plan
July 30	Grantee reporting documents due
August 21 – September 29	Draft of the Digital Equity Plan released; OBD works with DCCs to collect feedback via surveys, meetings, and in-person gatherings
October 1 – 31	OBD revises plan based on feedback
November 30	OBD submits final draft of plan to federal government

Dates and activities are subject to revision. Any changes will be communicated by OBD.

20. When do Committees start meeting?

OBD recommends that Committees plan to hold their first meeting no later than early April. April 3 is the “official” start date for Committee activities. Those wishing to convene in advance are welcome to.

21. When do Committees stop meeting?

This is up to you. Committees’ information gathering activities will wrap up by June 30. Committees may choose to disband at this point or reconvene in late August to provide feedback on a draft of the Digital Equity Plan.