

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Digital Access for All Idahoans statewide Plan – information item

Funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is provided for each state to develop a digital access plan to ensure that every American can use reliable high-speed internet service. With support from Governor Brad Little and the Idaho Department of Commerce, the Idaho Commission for Libraries will lead Idaho’s planning effort with multiple state, local, and community stakeholders to identify and implement strategies to develop digital literacy training, provisions for technical support, and online privacy and cybersecurity resources.

The ICfL will utilize \$1.25 million to contract with an expert to help write the final plan and conduct some baseline needs assessment components. Travel, meeting, and focus group costs will also be covered with this funding source. The ICfL will collaborate with key stakeholders and use existing staff to develop, implement, and oversee the Digital Access for All Idahoans Plan. These one-time funds will be used for the one-time costs of developing a statewide plan. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) provides additional funding for states that have access plans. States have five years to spend their grant awards.

The target audience for this project is low-income households, aging individuals, incarcerated individuals, veterans, individuals with disabilities, individuals with a language barrier, individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, and individuals who primarily reside in a rural area. If stakeholders don’t come together to create a plan and implement it in the next five years, more Idahoans will lack the resources and knowledge to fully benefit from the opportunities that access to the internet provides.

These NTIA funds under the IIJA are available in October 2022 and specific guidelines must be followed to receive the funds. The ICfL will have a year to develop the plan once the funds are received, however much of the coalition-building and work can begin prior to that. Idaho legislative approval is needed to receive the federal funds.

A good summary of the Digital Equity Act, written by the Benton Institute staff, can be found at <https://www.benton.org/blog/largest-us-investment-broadband-adoption-ever>.