Key Steps for Leaders to Ensure Access for All Learners, Families/Caregivers, and Communities

Grounded in the barriers to and strategies for accessing broadband and technology tools for learning shared by community leaders and members in listening sessions, this section provides key steps for leaders as they develop strategies for working toward digital equity. Each community will require collaboration among leaders and community members to co-develop and implement strategies that are aligned to their unique circumstances and address the three components of access—availability, affordability, and adoption.

Develop and earn public trust through partnerships

- Leaders develop cross-sector coalitions bringing together state or territory and local government agencies, Tribes, K-12 school districts, higher education institutions, edtech companies, ISPs, nonprofits, local philanthropies, and other trusted community leaders. Leaders work with partners to develop long-term, sustainable solutions, while providing immediate, tested, interim solutions that provide access to broadband in the meantime.
- Leaders work in partnership with the coalition to co-develop strategies, protocols, and best practices for hosting community-led conversations with those who are most impacted by the digital divide and learn about the evolving barriers and needs within each community.

Learn from those impacted by inequitable access and provide opportunities for feedback

- Leaders prioritize partnering with community-based organizations to engage with learners, families/caregivers, and communities most impacted by the digital divide. They collect representative and accurate, disaggregated information and data around the availability, affordability, and adoption of broadband and technology tools for learning.
- Leaders create safe and confidential spaces for community members to share information and feedback. The goal of these conversations is to understand learners' needs and create space for determining the most appropriate course of action. Accessibility and cultural responsiveness are vital to creating meaningful and inclusive conversations. Leaders provide translators for each language spoken throughout the community, hold the conversations in a location that is accessible and convenient for participants, and identify and provide accommodations for participants with disabilities. For example, virtual conversations may not be accessible to community members who do not have access to reliable, high-speed broadband or devices. Other community members may not have a mode of transportation or flexible work hours and may need to participate virtually.
- Leaders provide support to make the experience meaningful for community members, such as providing a meal, childcare services, and digital inclusion navigators to support community members in learning about and enrolling in available digital access programs.
- Leaders provide community leaders and members with updates on progress implementing the digital equity plan. As digital equity plans are maintained and adjusted, leaders continuously consult community leaders and members for feedback on progress and proposed strategic shifts.

Co-develop clear goals and strategies with communities to craft a comprehensive digital equity plan

- When bringing together government agencies to develop a digital equity plan, leaders include those outside of the information technology sphere. Leaders invite both education agencies and those focused on other aspects of learners' and families' lives that require broadband, such as health and human services, housing, energy, environment, labor, and justice, including corrections. Education agencies, specifically, can help to gather data from learners and their families/caregivers, convene necessary partners such as educators and librarians, coordinate technology procurement, and ensure digital equity efforts will positively impact learning goals.

- Leaders recognize the unique expertise and experiences of each member and organization involved in the partnership. The most meaningful partnerships will be grounded in trust, where participating members and organizations value and respect one another. Leaders acknowledge, name, and attend to the power imbalances and assumptions of knowledge that exist and work to actively counter these notions.

- Leaders, in partnership with community-based organizations and community anchor institutions, use asset-mapping to identify strengths of the community and existing programs that can be leveraged and extended. Leaders use currently successful strategies as a basis for scaling up.

- While leaders build and implement long-term solutions to meet existing needs, they also ensure communities can maintain the short-term solutions in the meantime. Districts, schools, institutions, and communities have built temporary solutions to create immediate fixes to systemic issues. Leaders ensure funds are used to invest in community members and organizations for the time, effort, and expertise they bring to the partnership and conversations.

Raise public awareness and provide ongoing support for low- or no-cost broadband programs

- Leaders, in partnership with community-based organizations and community anchor institutions, engage in outreach through both analog and digital communications methods, in accessible formats, and in multiple languages to share available programs.

- Leaders, in partnership with community-based organizations and community anchor institutions, provide ongoing, multilingual, and personalized support (such as digital navigators) for families/caregivers and learners to learn about and register for low-cost broadband programs. Personalized outreach from people that community members know and trust is essential to get buy-in for programs and to support their enrollment.

Provide digital literacy training and professional learning opportunities

- Leaders identify and share broadly all resources available to support digital literacy training, particularly multilingual and accessible offerings.

- Leaders work with schools, districts, and institutions of higher education to create professional learning opportunities for educators and faculty to improve their digital instruction practices.

- Leaders, in partnership with community-based organizations and community anchor institutions, provide multilingual, on-demand technical support, which is essential for learners and families to maintain their connection to broadband.