



Texas Digital Opportunity Plan

DRAFT – November 2023



**TEXAS BROADBAND
DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**



Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

1. Executive Summary

The Texas Broadband Development Office (BDO), under the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, developed the Texas Digital Opportunity Plan (“the plan”) to complement broadband infrastructure programs already underway in the state, including the Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) program and the state’s Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program.

With a greater focus on the affordability, adoption and safe and effective use of the internet, the plan aligns with National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) requirements identified in the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program’s Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and incorporates feedback from a thorough public engagement initiative.

The purpose of this plan is to guide non-infrastructure-related digital opportunity investments and to position the BDO to receive Capacity Grant funds from NTIA to deploy over the next five years, with a focus on closing the digital divide in Texas and ensuring every Texan has the skills and abilities to fully and safely utilize broadband access provided by the BEAD program and other sources of funding.



Image credit: Stock Images, Microsoft

The plan sets the BDO’s vision and goals for digital opportunity in the state, assesses the current state of access and barriers to digital opportunity, outlines how

the BDO will collaborate with stakeholders to address challenges and describes the strategies and actions the BDO will take to realize its vision and goals.

Texas' Vision for Digital Opportunity

Improve quality of life and promote economic growth by enabling fast, reliable and affordable broadband connectivity for all residents and businesses of Texas, promoting universal broadband adoption and providing access to digital skills development.

Achieving this vision will advance state policy priorities and efforts in six areas:

- **Economic and Workforce Development:** The Texas economy will grow stronger and more resilient through a more skilled workforce from farms to factories, offices to community anchor institutions, with talent staying and growing in communities to support further economic development.
- **Education:** Texans will have access to a higher quality education no matter where they live, with the opportunity for educational advancement in any stage of life, through online learning opportunities.
- **Health:** Recognizing that broadband adoption is a “super determinant” of health, widespread broadband adoption will result in improved personal and community health across Texas.
- **Accessibility of Essential Services:** Texans will have greater access to the resources and tools they need, ensuring effective use of public resources and safer and more resilient communities – especially during extreme weather events.
- **Civic and Social Engagement:** Texans will be more connected to one another, their communities and their government with improved tools to participate in civic processes.
- **Business and Telecommunications:** The Texas telecom industry and business community will grow stronger as more Texans adopt internet services and gain digital skills for the future.

The BDO will measure and track outcomes in these priority areas in five categories of measurable objectives, as defined by the NTIA: (1) the availability of, and affordability of access to, fixed and wireless broadband technology; (2) the online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services; (3) digital literacy; (4) awareness of, and the use of, measures to secure the online privacy of, and cybersecurity with respect to, an individual; and (5) the availability and affordability of consumer devices and technical support for those devices.

The BDO conducted a statewide digital opportunity planning process, including 26 public engagement meetings; 37 stakeholder focus groups with outcome area leaders, regional leaders and members of eight “covered populations” (aging individuals, incarcerated individuals, individuals with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, low-income households, racial and ethnic minorities, rural residents and veterans); and engagement with close to 15,500 Texans in total. Through this planning process, the BDO defined the following specific goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) that will guide implementation efforts:

Goal 1: All Texans have access to reliable, affordable broadband internet service at home.

- KPI 1.1 – Increase the percentage of Texans with reliable broadband subscriptions available in their homes.
- KPI 1.2 – Decrease the percentage of individuals who cite cost as a barrier to home internet service.
- KPI 1.3 – Increase the percentage of Texans who are aware of and enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) or other low-cost or subsidized internet service options.

Goal 2: All Texans have access to affordable computers and other internet-enabled devices in their home, with corresponding technical support services.

- KPI 2.1 – Increase the percentage of Texans who have home access to affordable internet-enabled devices other than a smartphone.

- KPI 2.2 – Increase access to technical support for more Texans with internet-enabled devices.

Goal 3: All Texans have a broad foundation of digital literacy skills and access to a continuum of digital skills development programs.

- KPI 3.1 – Increase the percentage of Texans who have basic digital literacy skills.
- KPI 3.2 – Increase the availability of digital literacy programs and services.
- KPI 3.3 – Increase the percentage of Texas workers who have the level of digital skills training jobs require.

Goal 4: All Texans feel safe online and are familiar with cybersecurity and online privacy measures.

- KPI 4.1 – Increase the percentage of Texans who are familiar with cybersecurity and online privacy measures.

Goal 5: Increase the percentage of Texans who utilize the internet for public resources and services.

- KPI 5.1 – Increase the percentage of Texans who utilize and understand how to use the internet for public resources and services.

These statewide goals are intended to advance digital opportunity for all covered populations. Access to reliable broadband service is the first step toward achieving these goals and the focus of billions of dollars in infrastructure investment in the state. Nonetheless, as demonstrated through the needs assessment and asset inventory completed for this plan, even after reliable broadband service is available, Texans need greater options for affordability and access to a continuum of digital literacy training and skills development to make the most of the internet.

This plan includes an assessment of the state's current baseline as related to each specific goal and KPI. The data demonstrates that needs are not equal across populations and geographies, and thus the plan requires approaches tailored to the communities most in need. For example, rural and economically disadvantaged

communities demonstrate a higher overall need for services and support than other parts of Texas. The Upper Rio Grande and South Texas regions experience the highest rates of digital disparity¹ coupled with limited organizational resources².

Among other priorities, this plan seeks to address the need for:

- Foundational digital literacy skills for all Texans and especially low-income households, individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities.
- Language and culture-specific resources for individuals with limited English proficiency, who have some of the highest digital disparities among covered populations.
- Expanded access to devices other than smartphones, especially for covered populations such as low-income households.
- Improved adoption of online privacy and cybersecurity measures and increased awareness of online privacy and cybersecurity among individuals with limited English proficiency.
- Improved online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and service among covered populations.
- Reliable, affordable broadband connections for rural residents and organizations implementing community-based programs.
- Increased adoption of broadband service beyond mobile data plans for low-income households and rural residents.
- Enrollment support for low-cost internet services and subsidy programs like the ACP.
- Support for organizations to engage communities in existing programs.

¹ See map from [Microsoft's Digital Equity Data Dashboard](#)

² See Digital Resources Mapping Tool Survey (DRMTS)

The BDO will advance the following four primary strategies to address these needs and other barriers identified in this plan and to realize its goals and overall vision:



Strategy 1: Partner With and Fund Statewide Organizations. The BDO will work with a range of state agencies and other statewide partners already actively involved in advancing digital opportunity across the state, ensuring that work is supportive of realizing the goals of this plan. The BDO will partner and collaboratively plan with agencies such as the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), with the goal of enhancing and expanding those agencies' programs through funding available from the state's forthcoming Capacity Grant.



Strategy 2: Fund Local Partners. Broadband adoption, digital literacy, device access and many other aspects of digital opportunity require locally based, culturally appropriate efforts. Leadership should come from the same communities that these efforts aim to serve; trust, safety and confidence are essential components of digital opportunity. The BDO will allocate a portion of its Capacity Grant to create a digital opportunity grant program, comparable to the BOOT program for broadband infrastructure, to fund local initiatives addressing the gaps in digital opportunity for covered populations and underserved regions.



Strategy 3: Promote Internet Adoption. The BDO recognizes that building the physical infrastructure to connect unserved and underserved Texans to broadband is only one component of expanding broadband adoption. Therefore, the BDO will promote activities to support Texans in signing up for and using broadband service as it is made available across the state – benefitting Texans, multiple statewide priorities and the telecom industry through an expanded customer base.



Strategy 4: Maintain a Living Digital Opportunity Plan. The BDO envisions this plan as a living document, to be updated through continued research. The BDO has gathered extensive baseline data,

established relationships with stakeholders and residents and gained a firm understanding of the current needs and barriers of Texans statewide – regionally and among covered populations. The BDO aims to build upon this foundation and make this plan a sustainable resource to promote digital opportunity statewide by measuring progress while continuing to collect critical data to enable the state and its local partners to advance and iterate impactful programs.

By delivering on these strategies over the next five years, Texas will make the most of broadband infrastructure investments and sustainably advance the statewide vision of digital opportunity for all Texans.