

DIGITAL INCLUSION



Digital Navigators providing technology access, support, and training at a community-based organization

The costs of digital exclusion are increasingly evident as digitalization transforms how individuals and communities can fully participate in our society, democracy, and economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed this long-standing need for all to have access to a reliable and affordable home broadband internet connection, an appropriate device, and the skills to use them. **LISC understands that access to affordable broadband services expands families' health, wealth, and educational opportunities across the nation.**

Yet [up to 42 million Americans](#) still lack access to these services, left behind in an interconnected world that increasingly relies on high-speed internet. This digital divide disproportionately impacts low-income and rural areas, and particularly communities of color, as broadband availability is [significantly lower](#) in majority-African American and majority-Native American counties. **That's why LISC is advocating for broader federal investments in Digital Inclusion programs and services.**

What is Digital Inclusion?

Digital Inclusion refers to the ability of individuals and groups to access and use the technology of the digital age, especially the Internet. Digital Inclusion activities advance equity, including affordable and reliable access to the Internet and computing technology; foundational digital skills training; and occupational digital literacy programs focused on equipping participants with the skills needed to succeed in the twenty-first century workforce.

Achieving digital equity will require federal policies and robust investments dedicated to addressing structural inequities broadly – universally available, reliable and affordable broadband

Internet and a population able to engage with technology in ways that enhance and advance their lives.

LISC programmatic efforts target both Internet and related-technology access and affordability:

- The [Financial Opportunity Center](#) network of nonprofit partners advance digital literacy and skills in communities across the country; and
- Rural LISC initiatives help communities plan for [broadband expansion and financing](#), and community-based organizations promote digital equity through a rural [Digital Navigator network](#).

Broadband accessibility

High-quality broadband infrastructure fosters educational equity, expands quality healthcare access, and drives economic growth and innovation. To achieve this, LISC supports efforts to raise the federal minimum fixed broadband benchmark speed from 25/3 to 100/25 Mbps.

Congress can provide the critical resources needed to get America connected by passing the [Rural Broadband Acceleration Act \(H.R. 7022\)](#), a bipartisan federal bill to immediately fund shovel-ready high-speed internet projects.

LISC also endorses the modernization of the Federal Communications Commission's Universal Service Fund (USF) by formally expanding the definition of covered communications services to include broadband services, thereby drawing contributions to the fund from broadband providers. **Congress can ensure the USF better promotes high quality broadband by passing the bipartisan [Universal Broadband Act of 2020 \(H.R. 6723\)](#).**

Affordability of internet access and related devices

In too many instances, many Americans simply cannot afford the service or the devices needed to use it. A [recent analysis](#) of low-income households earning less than \$30,000 a year found that 44 percent do not have broadband services, and 46 percent do not have a traditional computer or tablet.

LISC supports the [Affordable, Accessible Internet for All Act \(H.R. 7302\)](#), which would not only build high-speed broadband infrastructure in underserved areas, but also ensure the internet service is affordable and expand digital skill-building investments. In addition, we support updating federal affordable rental housing policies so broadband costs are eligible costs for federally-assisted tenants and for owners who provide internet, computer centers, and related services.

We also endorse improvements to the Federal Communications Commission's [Lifeline Program](#) to help low-income households overcome the cost of broadband adoption and required computer equipment.

Congress should pass the [Promoting Access to Broadband Act \(S. 2545\)](#), which would help increase awareness and enrollment in Lifeline for low-income households. Federal and state agencies can also facilitate automatic enrollment in the Lifeline Program through other income support programs, such as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP).

Community-based digital training and support

Achieving digital equity also necessitates robust support of digital literacy efforts. The need for digital skills to access opportunity in an increasingly [digitalized U.S. economy](#) has been noted for years. But we have yet to prioritize investment in the tools needed to address the digital literacy gap. Robust investment in [digital literacy efforts](#) can ensure widespread availability of education and training, providing participants with the [range of digital skills](#) needed to succeed. Community-based digital education and training can help the disconnected find jobs, [develop new skills](#), and access affordable financial services.

LISC endorses federal funding to help support the Digital Navigator Model developed by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance. Digital Navigators are [connectors and coaches](#) who work in client-serving roles at community organizations

like workforce development and social service agencies and help people address home connectivity, learn digital skills, and find digital inclusion resources.

Passage of the [Digital Equity Act of 2019 \(S. 1167\)](#) would establish two grant programs to bring significant funding to create and implement statewide digital equity plans; execute targeted digital equity projects; and conduct project evaluations to inform future policy efforts.

LISC is a national non-profit housing and community development intermediary with offices in 35 different cities and a national rural network of 87 organizations.

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