

ConnectALL Digital Equity Program – Digital Equity Technical Assistance
Request for Applications



Issued: 6 June 2024

Updated: July 25 2024

Contact: DigitalEquity@esd.ny.gov using the subject line “Digital Equity Technical Assistance RFA”

This Request for Applications (“RFA”) is posted on the Empire State Development website:
<https://broadband.ny.gov/digital-equity-technical-assistance-fund>

Applications must be submitted through the New York State Consolidated Funding Application
(CFA) Portal:

<https://apps.cio.ny.gov/apps/cfa/>

APPLICATION DUE DATE: 30 July 2024

Program Overview

The mission of the New York State Urban Development Corporation d/b/a Empire State Development (ESD) is to promote a vigorous and growing state economy, encourage business investment and job creation, and support diverse, prosperous local economies across New York State through the efficient use of loans, grants, tax credits, real estate development, marketing, and other forms of assistance. ConnectALL is Governor Hochul's initiative to address New York State's digital divide by transforming the state's digital infrastructure and ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to reliable and affordable high-speed broadband internet service. ESD's ConnectALL Office, as the entity responsible for implementing the ConnectALL initiative, provides grants through multiple programs to address the digital divide, to promote a robust broadband marketplace, and to ensure all homes and businesses have access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet.

ConnectALL's Digital Equity Technical Assistance Program (the "Program"), as implemented through this Request for Applications (RFA), will provide targeted funds to digital inclusion providers to advance their collaborative capacities to grow the New York State digital equity ecosystem. Applicants may request funds to improve their capabilities as digital inclusion program-providers and digital equity grant-seekers in advance of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) \$1.4B Digital Equity Capacity Grant program ¹

ConnectALL is designated as the administrator of the Program, and is authorized to determine program structure and requirements, evaluate applicant information, monitor successful grantees for project completion and satisfactory performance, collect grantee data to ensure compliance with all program requirements, verify allowable uses of funds, and approve disbursement of grant funds to selected grantees.

Program Background

During the State's digital equity planning phase, ConnectALL listened to digital equity practitioners, advocates, coalitions, and others as they engaged residents across all ten regions of the state and the five boroughs of New York City to actively inform the resulting Plan. As a result, ConnectALL recognizes that both established and emerging digital equity organizations need support to fortify their collective ability to participate in coalitions, carry out their missions, and directly address needs of Covered Populations as defined in Section I.C. of the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity. Covered Populations are:

- i) Individuals who live in covered households the income of which for the most recently completed year is not more than 150 percent of an amount equal to the poverty level, as determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census;

¹ [Digital Equity Act Programs | BroadbandUSA \(doc.gov\)](#)

- ii) Aging individuals who are 60 and above
- iii) Incarcerated individuals, other than those incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility;
- iv) Veterans;
- v) Individuals with disabilities;
- vi) Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are English learners; and have low levels of literacy;
- vii) Individuals who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group;
- viii) Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area.

Accordingly, this technical assistance fund enables non-governmental entities that comprise the digital equity ecosystem to strengthen their positioning to apply for, and receive, federal and state funding as individual groups, as leads for coalitions participants, or as collaborators in service to a Covered Population or thematic outcomes area (i.e., education, employment, health, civic engagement, or access to government services).

Funding Source

New York State Executive Budget.

Program Eligibility Requirements

Entities seeking technical assistance support must meet the requirements below:

- Be a non-governmental nonprofit entity registered with the Charities Bureau, Office of the New York State of the Attorney General, or a Tribal Non-Governmental Entity, with at least two years in operation in the State of New York.
- Applicant must directly serve one or more Covered Population in the State of New York through the provision of one of the measurable objectives laid out in the State Digital Equity Plan, below:
 - Availability and affordability of access to broadband technology;
 - Online accessibility and inclusivity of public resources and services;
 - Digital literacy;
 - Online privacy and cybersecurity; and
 - Availability/affordability of consumer devices and technical support for those devices.
- Demonstrate a specific, time-bound gap in capacity that limits Applicant's ability to plan towards, and apply for, federal and state grants essential digital equity programs or services for Covered Populations. The following non-exhaustive list of examples is provided for illustrative purposes: e.g., a digital equity coalition needs capacity and structure to identify regional and common goals;

a lead nonprofit lacks resources to support standardized data collection to streamline reporting; newcomers to the field need immediate upskilling on technical matters to reach grant goals, etc.

Program Description

ConnectALL has allocated a total of one million and four hundred thousand dollars to fund grants for the eligible uses described below, and for additional activities that may be set forth in the grant disbursement agreement (GDA) that ConnectALL will negotiate and execute with each grantee. The maximum request and award for each grant is \$100,000. ConnectALL will issue awards in each geographic region in New York State: Capital Region, Central New York, Finger Lakes, Long Island, Mid-Hudson, Mohawk Valley, North Country, Southern Tier, Western New York, and New York City. In the case of the New York City region, awards will be issued in each New York City Borough: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and The Bronx. The technical assistance funded by this grant must be completed within 12 months. Grantees must commit to meeting with ConnectALL as necessary, and are required to submit final reports on project status and financials as directed by ConnectALL.

State assistance awarded and paid to a grant recipient shall not exceed 90% of the total eligible costs.² Payments to awardees will be made through the reimbursement of expenses at agreed-upon delivery of specific project requirements. Grants awarded through this program may be subject to Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) participation goals. Empire State Development typically assigns a 30% target for MWBE participation. This target may be adjusted based on the applying entity, the scope of work, and whether the work will be contracted or self-performed by the applying entity.

Eligible Uses of Funds

Eligible uses for technical assistance funding include:

- Hiring consultants to convene and facilitate regional, coalition, or network-level digital equity efforts (i.e., retreats; integrating Covered Populations into planning) to support collaborative federal and state grant submissions
- Hiring grant-writers or development consultants to foster other fund acquisition processes
- Resourcing fiscal management/grants-tracking software licenses
- Bringing in data analysts to streamline or standardize data practices, asset mapping, or can assist with the production of public-facing dashboards
- Hiring evaluators to produce research for planning and reporting on digital equity needs and outputs at the Tribal, local, regional, coalition or network level and can in turn support competitive applications to federal and state grant opportunities

² Total project cost is the sum of State funds awarded to an awardee and equity contributed by the awardee. Equity is defined as cash injected into the project by the Recipient and should be auditable through Recipient financial statements or Recipient accounts, if requested by ESD. Equity cannot be borrowed money secured by the assets in the project. May also be in-kind contribution.

- Enrolling staff in trainings to advance culturally responsive instructional methods or technical skills to aid in program or service delivery for Covered Populations
- Improving communications and public outreach to support persuasive digital equity impact storytelling
- Translation or Plain Language services to reach diverse language participants, translate existing program materials, and raise awareness of digital equity resources for hard-to-reach Covered Populations
- Other uses approved and authorized in writing by ConnectALL, consistent with applicable NTIA requirements and Program guidelines

Ineligible uses of non-capital funds include the following types of expenses:

- Construction in any form.
- Duplicative project costs such as pre-application expenses funded by another award.
- Indirect or Overhead costs.
- Staff salaries or stipends.
- Activities defined as ineligible uses under applicable State law.

Where reasonable and relevant to the purpose of this Program, Applicants may bundle technical assistance requests in one submission totaling up to \$100,000.

Program Application

Applications must be submitted through the CFA Portal. A list of application questions is provided below.

1. Application Profile, Experience and Qualifications
 - a. Name of and address for the primary applicant organization
 - b. Identify the applicant entity type:
 - i. Non-profit Community Based Organization
 - ii. Anchor Institution serving Covered Populations
 - iii. Digital Equity Coalition or Network
 - iv. Tribal Non-Governmental Entity
 - v. Other type of non-profit (specify)
 - c. Point of contact name
 - d. Email
 - e. Phone number
 - f. Operating budget
 - g. Type of legal entity
 - h. EIN

- i. Number of years in operation
2. Please answer the following questions:
 - a. Provide a brief overview of Applicant mission and goals.
 - i. Is Applicant applying solely or on behalf of several organizations? Yes or No
 - ii. What are the other organizations participating in the effort?
 - b. What digital equity needs does the Applicant address through its programs or services? Where are these programs and services delivered (local, county, regional, etc.)?
 - c. Which Covered Population/s does the Applicant presently serve? What Covered Populations does Applicant seek to reach beyond the current scope, if any?
 - d. Describe the capacity gap that Applicant faces in meeting its digital equity goals to best serve Covered Populations. This can be as a sole Applicant or on behalf of a group of providers or coalition. Why does this gap exist?
 - e. What capacity resourcing does the Applicant need to address this gap?
 - i. Describe up to three solutions. Why is this cost outside the scope of current activities? How does it address an emergent opportunity?
 - f. Describe anticipated impact of support
 - i. What will the Applicant be able to do differently or better once this capacity is in place?
 - ii. How might capacity be sustained?
 - iii. Which Covered Populations will be affected long-term?
3. Disclosures and Acknowledgement of Requirements
 - a. Applicant acknowledges it meets all Project Requirements.
 - b. Applicant acknowledges review of and compliance with this RFA, including any updates. ConnectALL reserves the right to amend the requirements
 - c. Applicant acknowledges that payment will be made on a reimbursement basis; ConnectALL will only reimburse for completed deliverables with completed proof of payment (e.g. receipts and invoices).

Program Timeline

ConnectALL will make awards during an initial funding round. Pending remaining funds, ConnectALL may consider adding a second and/or subsequent round(s). The timing of the opening and closing of funding rounds and award totals are subject to change at ConnectALL's discretion. Applicants may submit multiple applications under this RFA, but are encouraged to submit each application in a different application round. Applications for the Program's initial funding round will be accepted through the application deadline of July 15, 2024 by 5:00pm, or until ConnectALL pauses or closes the RFA – whichever is sooner. Pending funding availability, ConnectALL may, at its discretion, consider launching additional grant application round(s) and information session(s) later in the year.

Respondents are encouraged to submit applications as soon as they are able; applications will be reviewed in the order in which they are received. ConnectALL will evaluate applications under criteria put forward in the RFA. Applicants who are deemed conditionally eligible based on the evaluation criteria will be invited to meet and confer with ConnectALL to negotiate an Incentive Proposal which will outline the specific terms and conditions of a funding award. Applicants may not undertake any work on their proposed project before an Incentive Proposal is signed.

Application Process

ConnectALL will execute a Grant Disbursement Agreement with each grantee that will describe the planned use of funds, the timeline, and intended impact.

Grantee Selection Timeline

Milestone	Date
Request for Applications issued	6 June 2024
Opening of Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) Portal	17 June 2024
Information session	24 & 27 June 2024
Application submission deadline	30 July 2024
Notification of conditional eligibility	August 2024
Anticipated incentive proposal execution	August 2024
<i>All schedule descriptions and dates are tentative and subject to change.</i>	

Information Sessions

ConnectALL will hold two Technical Assistance Fund Information Sessions via Webinar on June 24 and June 27, 2024. Pending funding availability, ConnectALL may, at its discretion, consider launching additional grant application round(s) and information session(s) later in the year. All parties interested in responding to this Request for Applications are encouraged to attend an information session, and can register here for [June 24, 2024](#) or [June 27, 2024](#). During each information session, ConnectALL will review the Request for Applications process and terms. Information shared during these information sessions is not intended to change nor supplement the RFA solicitation document. Any changes will be in writing in the form of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) issued by ConnectALL and posted on the website: <http://broadband.ny.gov>. Slides and the recording of the information session(s) will be made available following the session at <http://broadband.ny.gov>.

Questions may be submitted to DigitalEquity@esd.ny.gov, and responses will be posted in the FAQ. Please include “Digital Equity Technical Assistance Program Request for Applications” in the subject line of the email.

Application Review and Selection Criteria

ConnectALL will review applications for eligibility, completeness, quality, and readiness with respect to this Request for Applications. Applications shall be processed in full compliance with the applicable provisions of federal and state law, including 16-GG*2 of the New York State Urban Development Corporation Act. ConnectALL will score proposals based on stated requirements and evaluation criteria. Based on the availability of funds, ConnectALL will deem the highest-scoring proposals to be conditionally eligible in each region and across geographic spread. If funds remain, a second and/or subsequent grant application round(s) may open later in the year.

Application Evaluation Criteria

	Evaluation Criteria	Scoring Weight
A	Applicant Profile, Experience, and Qualifications <i>Qualifications of key personnel, management and grant administration experience, Covered Populations served</i>	15%
B	Approach and Scope <i>Demonstrated capacity gap and proposed solution to address gap</i>	35%
C	Impact <i>Entity capacity to better address digital equity needs and projected benefit for Digital Equity Act Covered Populations</i>	35%
D	Funding Request	15%
Total		100%

As a condition of the grant award, grantees will each enter into a Grant Disbursement Agreement with ConnectALL, which will outline the Program’s stipulations for compliance with Program requirements and penalties for failures to comply. The disbursement of funds detailed in the Grant Disbursement Agreement may differ based on the agreed-upon scope of work for each grantee (or subgrantee); and the grant amount and terms of each Grant Disbursement Agreement may vary accordingly. Payments will be made as reimbursement of expenses at agreed-upon project milestones that meet specific project requirements. The final portion will be due upon ConnectALL’s verification of completion of the project.

Dedicated Email: All questions or requests for clarification must be in writing, sent by email to DigitalEquity@esd.ny.gov. Include "Digital Equity Technical Assistance Fund Request for Applications" in the subject line of the email. Request for Applications" in the subject line of the email.

Change Log

7/25/24	"\$1.6B Digital Equity Competitive Grants" omitted for Program Overview.
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