Digital Opportunity Listening Session Facilitator Toolkit

Revised: May 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has allocated $60 Million to U.S. states and territories to develop Digital Equity plans to lay out strategies to ensure and empower all individuals to access digital opportunities fully.

The State of Tennessee is developing its first Digital Opportunity Plan to identify Internet access barriers and propose strategies to address affordability, accessibility, and awareness issues. The Broadband Office at the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) invites communities to share their experiences around digital opportunity barriers and offer feedback on the resources that would be most useful to them in obtaining full, reliable access to digital opportunities. The "Listening Session Facilitator Toolkit" was created to help Tennessee communities facilitate conversations around Digital Opportunity and submit that feedback to the Broadband Office at TNECD.

The Listening Session Facilitator Toolkit is for local community leaders, organizations, or individuals that want to organize and host a Digital Opportunity Listening Session. The toolkit includes a presentation with facilitator talking points, a Digital Opportunity one-pager, a post-listening session submission form, and a facilitator feedback template to capture and submit information to TNECD's Broadband Office. The data received will aid in the state's Digital Opportunity Plan development.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

Each item in this Toolkit was developed to help gather public input from your community. This section will offer advice on using each of the tools. We encourage all Digital Opportunity Listening Session facilitators to conduct sessions in a way that is most appropriate for the communities and use these tools in a way that is most helpful to their communities. We ask that the data collected be put into the spreadsheet per the instructions in this document before submitting to TNECD's Broadband Office.

Overview of all materials provided within the Toolkit:

Listening Session Details
- This information gives participants a high-level understanding of Digital Opportunity and the importance of listening sessions in supporting Tennessee's Digital Opportunity Plan. Please print copies of this document for participants as they arrive for the listening session.

PowerPoint Presentation
- The PowerPoint presentation will set the stage for why the group is meeting. It provides a brief overview of the history of broadband policy at the state and federal levels and defines Tennessee's vision for Digital Opportunity.

Facilitator Talking Points
- The talking points provide the facilitator with additional information for conversation starters regarding Digital Opportunities. The talking points include definitions and notes that coincide with the PowerPoint Presentation.

Listening Session Flyer
- The flyer is to post outside the venue at the hosted session – it intends to be a way-finding document (if needed) to let participants know they are in the correct space for the listening session.

Post-Session Submission Form
- This form is to formally submit information to TNECD's Broadband Office. Once you have finalized all the data from the session, complete the submission form.

Feedback Template
- The feedback template (*see Example Feedback Template) is how the facilitator or team member will capture and record data in each Listening Session. It is best accessed using a computer or tablet to record input from community members. There are additional instructions on the template. Please review these instructions before you hold a listening session and train all facilitators on the template's use.

- For each question, **record answers only in the highlighted yellow cells** and record responses vertically, one response per cell.

LISTENING SESSION DETAILS

What is Digital Opportunity?
Digital opportunity is the idea that all individuals and communities have the resources to access the Internet, including existing broadband infrastructure in their communities, affordable Internet service, access to technology, and digital literacy tools.

What do listening sessions look like?
A listening session could be roundtable conversations in a living room or 100 people in a fellowship hall where community members and leaders can speak to the needs of their communities on digital opportunities, challenges, and successes within the community.

Why should I host a listening session?
Tennesseans participating in a Digital Opportunity Listening Session will shape how the state invests millions of dollars in our communities. By hosting a listening session, you are giving your community a voice in the state's Digital Opportunity Plan.

Who do I invite?
Anyone can be invited to attend. TNECD's Broadband Office especially wants input from the following covered populations:
- Low-income households
- Rural Tennesseans
- Aging individuals
- Members of racial and/or ethnic minority groups
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals with language barriers or low literacy
- Veterans
- Recently incarcerated individuals

Timeline:
- Listening session: March – June 2023
- Digital equity plan writing: June – August 2023
- Last day to submit listening session Input: June 26, 2023
- Public comment period: September 2023
- Edits to plan per public comment: October 2023
- Plan submission: October 2023

INTRODUCTORY TALKING POINTS

The talking points provide the facilitator with additional information for conversation starters regarding Digital Opportunity.

Why are we here today?
- We are here to discuss our experiences and those of our neighbors in accessing the Internet and taking advantage of digital resources and tools.
- This session is a way for us to directly influence the state's Digital Opportunity Plan and the strategies for implementing it.
- The input provided by you all today will shape how the state invests money in our community and others like it.

What about broadband infrastructure?
- We recognize that a lack of connectivity due to broadband infrastructure gaps may concern your community. The State of Tennessee is working to address this through various broadband infrastructure programs. While this is a concern, we want to focus today's conversations on other connectivity gaps, including affordability, digital skills training, and devices.

What kind of conversations do we need to focus on today?
- Experiences and challenges accessing the Internet in our own lives and in the lives of our loved ones, friends, and neighbors.
- What barriers exist for us today in taking full advantage of the Internet? Are they:
    - A lack of devices?
    - A lack of Internet connection?
    - A lack of digital skills?
    - Other barriers

What resources do we as a community have to address these barriers?
- Non-profit partners
- Free training for digital skills

What happens after today?
- The feedback you all provide will be recorded and sent to the Broadband Team at the Department of Economic and Community Development for them to process and include in the State's Digital Opportunity Plan.
    - No names or addresses will be collected.

- The insights from today will drive how to spend federal money addressing the barriers we all identified today.
- A draft of Tennessee's Digital Opportunity Plan will be posted for public comment in September 2023.
- The plan will be completed and sent to the federal government by October 31, 2023. The distribution of funds to Tennessee and other states is expected to take place in 2024.

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION TALKING POINTS

The PowerPoint presentation will set the stage for why the group is meeting. It provides a brief overview of the history of broadband policy at the state and federal levels and defines Tennessee's vision for Digital Opportunity. See pages 10-19 for the presentation.

Slide 3
- The state's broadband program started in 2017 with the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Act.
- The law created a grant program that helped fund broadband projects and connect thousands of unserved homes.

Slide 4
- In 2022, the state invested over $400 million in broadband infrastructure and digital adoption projects.
- Tennessee will receive additional funding in the following years from the federal government.

Slide 6
- Tennessee's Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) plan will primarily address strategies to provide broadband infrastructure across the entire state
- Tennessee's Digital Opportunity Plan will address affordability, accessibility, and digital skills barriers to using the Internet and other virtual resources.
- Today's listening session is to help inform the state's Digital Opportunity Plan.

Slide 8
- Digital Opportunity can be understood as everything we do with the Internet once we have reliable access.
- It's the services we use such as applying for jobs, entertainment, online banking, online shopping, skills training, and telehealth.

DEFINITIONS

Broadband is high-speed Internet access that is continuously operating and available for connection.

BEAD refers to the Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment Program, which provides $42.45 billion to expand high-speed Internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment, and adoption programs in the United States.

DEA refers to the Digital Equity Act, which is an additional pool of funds the federal government provides to support programs aimed at empowering all individuals and communities with the technology, skills, and information necessary to make full use of the Internet.

Digital Opportunity is the idea that all individuals and communities have the resources to access the Internet, including existing broadband infrastructure in their communities, affordable Internet service, access to technology, and digital literacy tools.

Digital Skills include anything from logging onto a computer, setting-up and email address, applying for jobs online to coding and web design. Digital Skills are crucial to taking advantage of the opportunities presented by Internet access.

Tennessee Department of Economic Community Development (TNECD) is the state agency planning and administering the State BEAD and DE Plans.

TOOLKIT LINKS

Visit the Digital Opportunity Facilitator Toolkit Materials website for the following:

- Listening Session Feedback Template
- Post Listening Session Submission Form
- Affordable Connectivity Program
- Digital Opportunity Listening Session Facilitator Toolkit Video
- PowerPoint
- Digital Opportunity Listening Session Flyer

TN Department of
Economic &
Community Development

Digital Opportunity
Listening Session

Date:

Time:

Location:

Your feedback will shape how the state invests millions of dollars into our communities.

TN Department of
Economic &
Community Development

Digital Opportunity
Listening Session

Agenda

- Introductions

- Overview of TN Broadband Programs and Digital Opportunity

- Small Group Discussions

- Concluding Remarks, and Wrap-Up

Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Act (2017)

Investment:

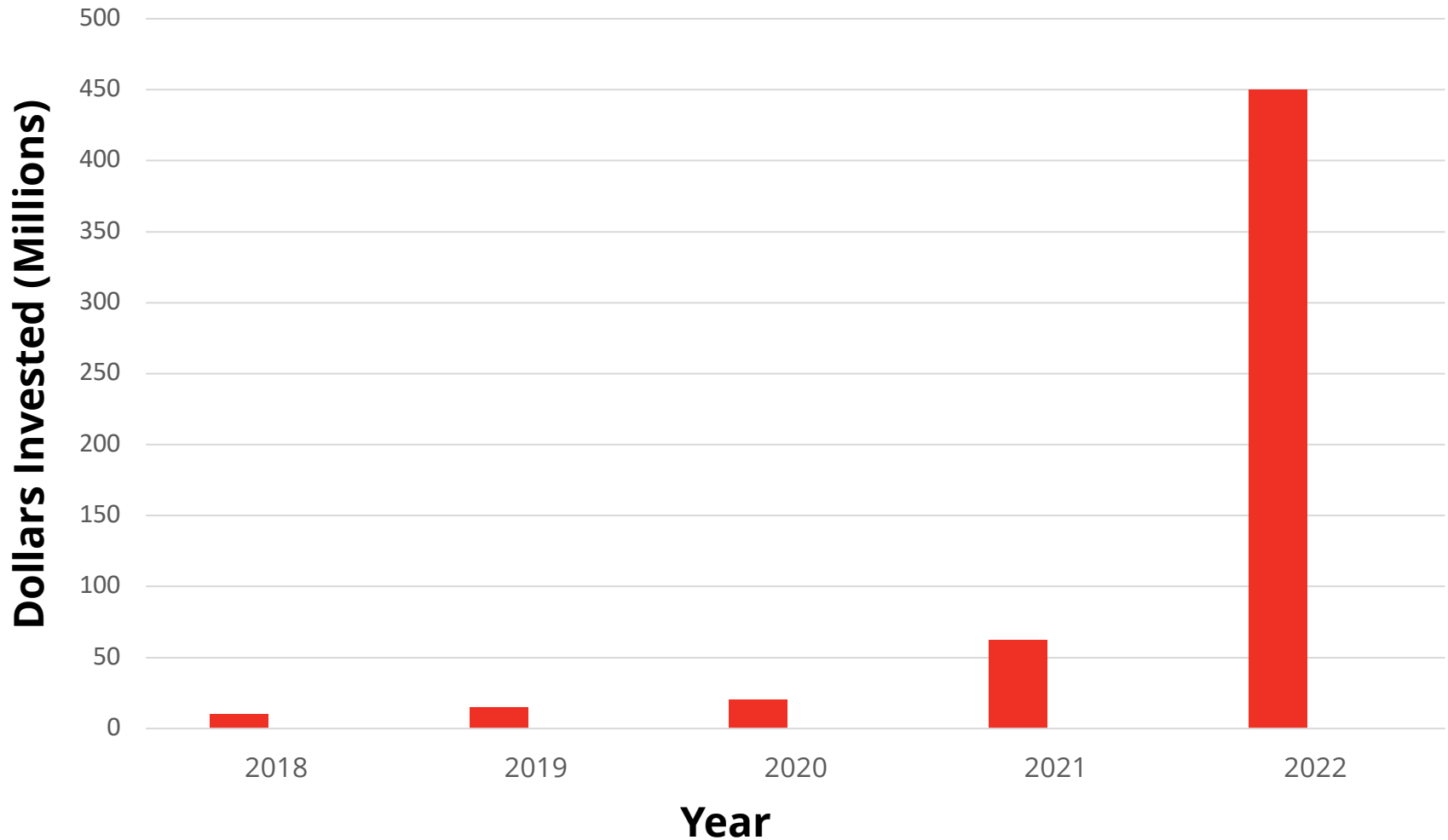- Any providers can apply for funds to offset the cost of deployment of broadband services to unserved areas

Deregulation:

- Electric cooperatives may provide broadband Internet and video services within their service area

Digital Inclusion:

- A portion of grant funds are awarded to libraries for digital skills training, equipment, and hot spot devices

TN

Funds Invested in TN for Broadband-Related Projects

- **The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (2021) allocated every state funding to close the digital divide**

- **TN must submit two plans on how the state will leverage funds to address the digital divide in the entire state**

Special focus on the eight "covered populations" which include: rural residents, racial/ethnic minorities, aging individuals, veterans, individuals with disabilities, low-income households, English Language Learners, and incarcerated individuals

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Tennessee Digital Opportunity Plan

The Digital Opportunity Plan must meet all the following criteria:

- Stated Vision of Digital Opportunity

- Asset Inventory and Needs Assessment

- Strategy for Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

- Implementation Strategy

Digital Opportunity is the idea that all individuals and communities have the resources to access the Internet, including existing broadband infrastructure in their communities, affordable Internet service, access to technology, and digital literacy tools.

Small Group Discussions

- **We will break out into small groups to have conversations about Digital Opportunity**

- **Conversations are around seven pre-set questions**

- **Facilitators will take notes during these conversations**
  - Feedback provided will be submitted to TNECD's Broadband Office and help guide the state's Digital Opportunity planning
  - No personally-identifying Information will be collected (i.e., no addresses, names, ages, etc.)

Closing and Next Steps

- The feedback provided today will be submitted to TNECD's Broadband Office

- The feedback submitted will help shape the state's Digital Opportunity Plan

- Thank you for attending this Digital Opportunity Listening Session and sharing your thoughts

Thank you!

Your feedback will shape how the state invests millions of dollars in our communities.

CONTACTS

Visit tn.gov/broadband or email us at
ecd.broadband@tn.gov for more information,
additional resources or to include us in your plans
for a listening session.

- **_Leah Mims_**
  TNECD Broadband Grants Coordinator
  leah.mims@tn.gov

- **_Codi Drake_**
  TNECD Broadband Grants Coordinator
  codi.drake@tn.gov

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