JUNETEENTH

REMEMBERING, REJOICING AND REFLECTING

THE INAUGURAL 2024 JUNETEENTH NATIONAL DIGITAL EQUITY BIBLE STUDY

This toolkit is created in collaboration with Black Churches 4 Digital Equity & Digital Equity Bible Study

BLACKCHURCHES4DIGITALEQUITY.COM

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BLACK CHURCHES 4 DIGITAL EQUITY: BACKGROUND

WHO WE ARE:

We are Black Churches 4 Digital Equity (BC4DE) Coalition, and we are building collaborative movements across the nation to make sure that our communities with the least access get digital equity. This is a fight for justice and access to affordable and reliable internet. Our communities need to thrive in the digital age.

Our coalition works to educate members of our community about broadband internet assistance programs and encourage unconnected households to get online. We also seek to train and organize leaders as advocates to connect their communities and advance digital equity.
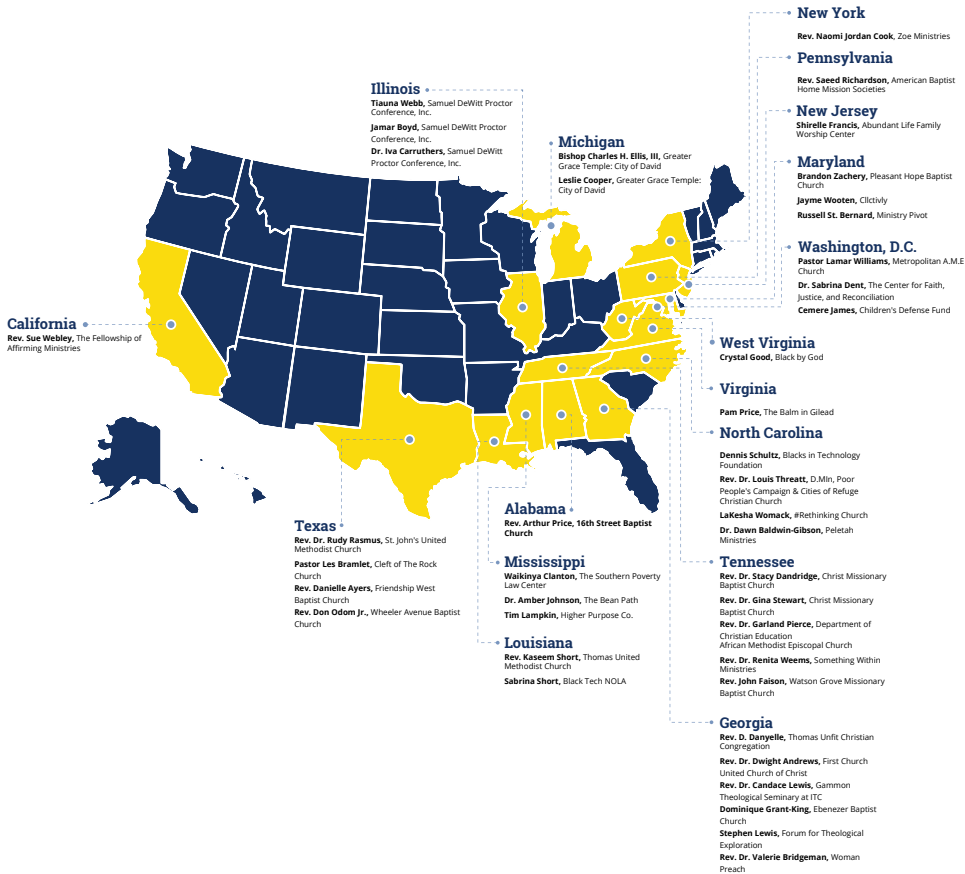
WHAT WE BELIEVE:

As community anchors, churches occupy a distinguished and valued role in guiding their congregations spiritually and navigating the complexities of today's world. In our increasingly digital society, the gap between those with access to technology and those without has become more apparent, influencing areas such as education, health, employment, and the ability to maintain connections with others.

Recognizing the critical role churches play in their communities and their mission to serve, churches must be involved in the significant initiative to bridge this digital divide. This harmonious effort will foster a healthy, educated, and spiritually fulfilled community. By participating in this initiative, churches facilitate opportunities for growth, learning, and connection beyond their immediate environments. This ensures that each community member possesses the necessary tools and skills to flourish in the digital era. Through active engagement with the church community, our aim is to leverage each church's unique strengths and resources, thereby facilitating a feasible contribution that deeply aligns with each church's vision for serving and enriching its community.

BLACK CHURCHES 4 DIGITAL EQUITY: MEMBERS

New York
Rev. Naomi Jordan Cook, Zoe Ministries

Pennsylvania
Rev. Saeed Richardson, American Baptist Home Mission Societies

New Jersey
Shirelle Francis, Abundant Life Family Worship Center

Maryland
Brandon Zachery, Pleasant Hope Baptist Church
Jayme Wooten, Cllctivly
Russell St. Bernard, Ministry Pivot

Washington, D.C.
Pastor Lamar Williams, Metropolitan A.M.E Church
Dr. Sabrina Dent, The Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation
Cemere James, Children's Defense Fund

West Virginia
Crystal Good, Black by God

Virginia
Pam Price, The Balm in Gilead

North Carolina
Dennis Schultz, Blacks in Technology Foundation
Rev. Dr. Louis Threatt, D.Min, Poor People's Campaign & Cities of Refuge Christian Church
LaKesha Womack, #Rethinking Church
Dr. Dawn Baldwin-Gibson, Peletah Ministries

Tennessee
Rev. Dr. Stacy Dandridge, Christ Missionary Baptist Church
Rev. Dr. Gina Stewart, Christ Missionary Baptist Church
Rev. Dr. Garland Pierce, Department of Christian Education African Methodist Episcopal Church
Rev. Dr. Renita Weems, Something Within Ministries
Rev. John Faison, Watson Grove Missionary Baptist Church

Georgia
Rev. D. Danyelle, Thomas Unfit Christian Congregation
Rev. Dr. Dwight Andrews, First Church United Church of Christ
Rev. Dr. Candace Lewis, Gammon Theological Seminary at ITC
Dominique Grant-King, Ebenezer Baptist Church
Stephen Lewis, Forum for Theological Exploration
Rev. Dr. Valerie Bridgeman, Woman Preach

Illinois
Tiauna Webb, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.
Jamar Boyd, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.
Dr. Iva Carruthers, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Inc.

Michigan
Bishop Charles H. Ellis, III, Greater Grace Temple: City of David
Leslie Cooper, Greater Grace Temple: City of David

California
Rev. Sue Webley, The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries

Texas
Rev. Dr. Rudy Rasmus, St. John's United Methodist Church
Pastor Les Bramlet, Cleft of The Rock Church
Rev. Danielle Ayers, Friendship West Baptist Church
Rev. Don Odom Jr., Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church

Alabama
Rev. Arthur Price, 16th Street Baptist Church

Mississippi
Waikinya Clanton, The Southern Poverty Law Center
Dr. Amber Johnson, The Bean Path
Tim Lampkin, Higher Purpose Co.

Louisiana
Rev. Kaseem Short, Thomas United Methodist Church
Sabrina Short, Black Tech NOLA

BLACK CHURCHES 4 DIGITAL EQUITY: MOVEMENT

We are **Black Churches 4 Digital Equity (BC4DE)** and we are building collaborative movement across the nation to make sure that our communities–communities with the least access–get digital equity. This is a fight for justice and access to affordable and reliable internet our communities need to thrive in the digital age.

Our coalition works to educate members of our community about broadband internet assistance programs, encourage unconnected households to get online, to train and organize leaders as advocates to get their communities connected, and to advance digital equity through the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)**.

ACP is an ambitious program that ensures every American family can afford home internet service. Black churches have always worked to connect resources to the community–and digital access is no different. The BC4DE movement organizes and empowers Black church leaders to use their trusted voices to advocate for digital equity, raise awareness of low-cost internet options, and encourage our community to sign up.

Our Journey and Milestones
In May 2021 the Multicultural Media and Telecom Internet Council (MMTC) joined with faith and civil rights leaders to launch BC4DE (formerly known as Black Churches 4 Broadband), a coalition dedicated to educating members of our community about broadband internet assistance programs and to advocate for a permanent broadband assistance benefit for low-income Americans.

BC4DE began with MMTC and six Black Church nonprofits mobilizing grassroots support for a permanent internet subsidy that included:

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BLACK CHURCHES 4 DIGITAL EQUITY: MOVEMENT CONT'D

Our Journey and Milestones Continued

The Balm in Gilead, The Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference, the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, the National Council of Black Churches, The Black Church PAC and Values Partnerships. The coalition grew to over 400 Black Church leaders, including, Rev. Dr. Renita Weems, Bishop Anne Henning Byfield, Rev. Traci Blackmon, and Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, coming together in this cause:

- Hundreds of religious and civil rights leaders sent a letter to Vice President Kamala Harris supporting the White House's effort to expand broadband access and calling for a permanent broadband benefit.
- Our Black Churches 4 Broadband Week of Action activated congregations to send emails, phone calls and tweets calling for a permanent broadband benefit.
- We educated thousands of Black church leaders about how they could help people in their communities access home internet benefits and advocate for digital equity.

We are agents of change when we come together as a community, and Congress responded by creating the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), signed into law as part of President Joe Biden's bipartisan infrastructure bill. We drove enrollment in the ACP during the ACP Day of Action in 2022 and 2023. Two thousand people attended 30 ACP events and a total of 1,000 ACP applications were submitted in 2022. In 2023, we held events across 15 cities in 13 states reaching 6,950 people in-person, and an estimated 100,000 by email.

Still, we know the fight is far from over. Digital equity demands more than just making broadband available and affordable: we also must equip and empower unconnected Americans with the skills they need to thrive online.

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BLACK CHURCHES 4 DIGITAL EQUITY: MOVEMENT CONT'D

Black Churches Have Always Championed Equity Continued

Black Churches diligently worked to identify the need to connect members of their communities to the internet and sought to provide that connection.

- Black Churches have long provided educational opportunities for adults, and with the advent of the digital era, they quickly realized that computers were necessary to serve this goal.
- Black Churches were among the vanguard in establishing community-directed computer labs for parishioners and members of the public.
- Faith-based nonprofits have also partnered directly with internet service providers to expand access to the internet. For example, Comcast has partnered with community centers, churches, and other faith-based nonprofits across the country to create "Lift Zones" that provide free internet as well as resources to build digital skills and support online learning.

Our pastors often take to the pulpit to share digital resources and engage with their congregations online. The pandemic has only underscored the need for digital connections, as congregations have had to shift many of their support networks and services online in recent years.

DIGITAL INEQUALITY BY THE NUMBERS

Home Internet Connectivity

Households

Black Adults
White Adults

0   20   40   60   80
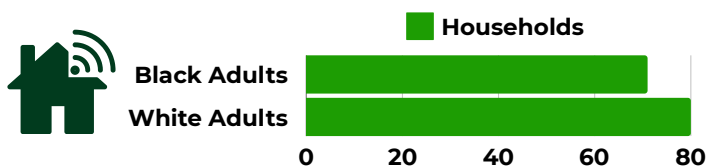
71% of Black adults have home broadband, compared to 80% of White adults. [Source: Pew 2021]

Home Computer Access

Households

Black Adults
White Adults

0   20   40   60   80
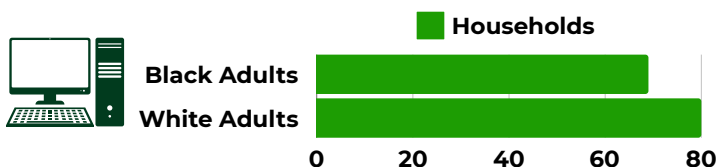
69% of Black adults have a computer in their homes, compared to 80% of White adults. [Source: Pew 2021]
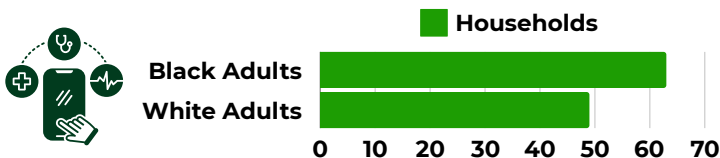
Digital Skills

Households

Black Workers
National Workforce

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70
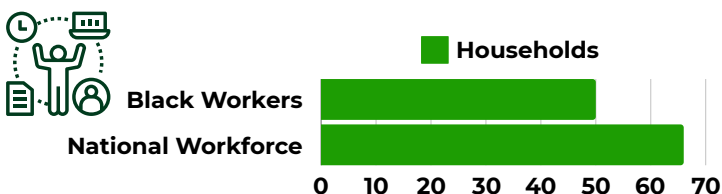
50% of Black workers have limited or no digital skills, compared to 66% of all workers. [Source: National Skills Coalition 2020]

DIGITAL INEQUALITY BY THE NUMBERS CONT'D

Healthcare Access

Households

Black Adults	
White Adults	

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70

63% of Black Adults - compared to 49% of White adults saynot having hig-speed internet. puts people at a major disadvantage when it comes to connecting with doctors or other medical professionals. [Source: Pew 2021]

35%

Less Likely to use TeleHealth Services

Black Americans are 35% less likely than White Americans to use TeleHealth services. [Source: Journal of General Internal Medicine 2022]

Rural Broadband Disparities

Households

Black Rural	
Nationwide	

0 20 40 60 80 100
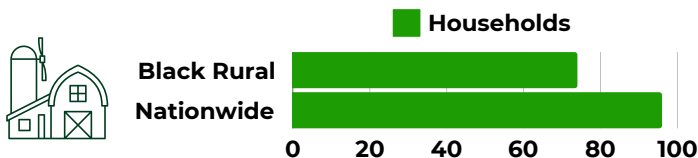
Only 74% of residents in the Black Rural South Residents have broadband service available where they live, compared to 96% of all Americans.

DIGITAL INEQUALITY BY THE NUMBERS CONT'D

Rural Broadband Disparities Continued

Households

Black Adults	
Nationwide	

0   20   40   60   80   100
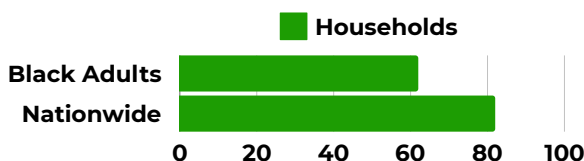
62% of African Americans in the Black Rural South lack a home internet connection, compared to 82% of all Americans nationwide.

49%
Poverty Rate

These digital disparities reinforce systemic poverty: 49% of Black Children in the Rural South live in poverty, compared to 19% of all children nationwide. [Source: Joint Center 2021]

STATE SPECIFIC INFORMATION:

Achieving digital equity begins with having a broadband internet connection. It also requires internet connected devices like laptops, tablets and phones along with the digital skills people need to take full advantage of opportunities online. This section provides information about state-specific statistics, trends, plans and resources to help build capacity for local congregations to spread awareness and take informed action.

We have provided both data and state resources for 14 states: IL, GA, Washington DC, NJ, MI, TN, NC, TX, AL, MS, MD, WV, VA & NY. If you do not find your state represented, please find your state's digital equity plan here: Digital Equity Plans. The list below will expand as we grow the capacity to support congregations in their localities across the country. This toolkit will be updated with data pertaining to every state– please stay in touch with Black Churches 4 Digital Equity Coalition as we add to this resource.

ALABAMA

The Data:

Alabama ranked sixth for the highest number of residents without internet access. 17% of Alabamians don't have access to this essential service at all.

17%
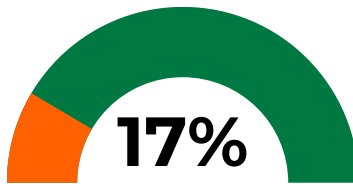
- In the rural parts of Alabama this number is even more stark, particularly in the western Black Belt and parts of rural east Alabama. For instance, about 55% of Wilcox County and 46% of Clay County have little to no broadband access.

**Clay County
45.5%**

**Wilcox County
54.5%**

State Resources:

- Alabama has programs aimed at expanding high-speed internet access statewide. These include the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund, which supports extending services to underserved areas, and the Community Broadband Technical Assistance Program, which aids in developing infrastructure.
- The state also utilizes broadband speed maps and conducts surveys to shape its expansion strategies. For more details, visit the ADECA Broadband website.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The Data:

28.2% of those living in the District of Columbia have no internet access available to them personally, despite the fact that 99.5% of the state have access to high speed wireless internet of up to 10Mbps. This shortage of internet is purely economic, and shows the digital divide among those with differing income brackets.

40% of residents do not have access to a wired low-priced broadband plan, meaning that nearly six in ten residents cannot purchase broadband at a price point of $60/month or less (excluding promotions and government programs).

83.6% of the District have fiber-optic internet as an option.

Households

No Money	
No Internet Service	
No Low Priced Service	

0   20   40   60   80   100
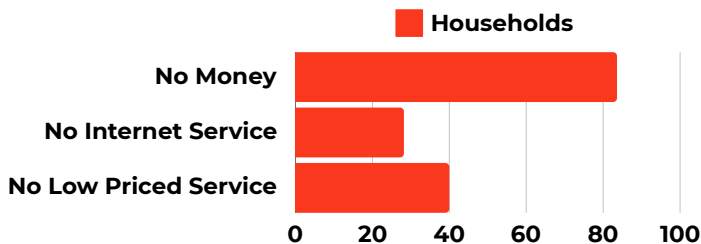
State Resources:

- The DC Community Access Network (DC-CAN) aims to provide affordable, high-value broadband services to over 250 community anchor institutions, including those dedicated to education, health, and public safety services in the District.
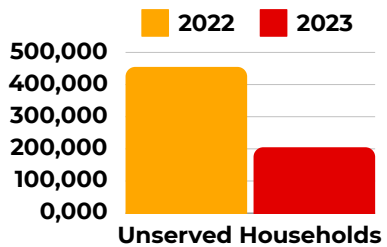
GEORGIA

The Data:

Georgia ranks 21st among all states for internet coverage.
The 2023 Georgia Broadband Map documents 204,968 unserved addresses – about 90 percent of which are in rural areas. This is an improvement from the 454,950 unserved addresses that were identified in the 2022 broadband annual report, but still highlights a stark discrepancy in connectivity availability.

Nearly six in ten residents are not able to purchase broadband at a price of $60/month or less (excluding promotions and government programs). This means that four in ten residents are unable to purchase a fiber internet plan.

2022 **2023**

500,000
400,000
300,000
200,000
100,000
0,000

Unserved Households

State Resources:

- Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Georgia Technology Authority have formed a five-agency team to coordinate for the implementation of the Georgia Broadband Program. The purpose of the Georgia Broadband Program is to coordinate and establish broadband programs to increase economic, education, and social opportunities for Georgia citizens and businesses. To learn more about the funding resources available, visit here.
- For detailed coverage and access maps, use the Georgia Broadband Map to find out which homes and businesses lack broadband services. This resource is vital for understanding the geographical distribution of broadband access in Georgia.
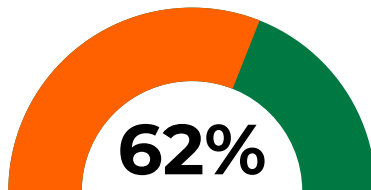
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ILLINOIS

The Data:

Illinois currently <u>ranks 14th among states</u> in internet coverage, speed and availability.

<u>In Illinois, 7% of residents</u> don't have adequate broadband infrastructure and 62% live in areas that have only one internet provider.

62%

- <u>Nearly six in ten residents</u> are not able to purchase broadband at a price of $60/month or less (excluding promotions and government programs).

- <u>Nearly one in four, or 23.2 percent</u>, of people in Illinois lacked access to broadband internet. In total, approximately 2,809,000 people are without broadband access at home.

State Resources:

- In Illinois, residents looking for broadband internet resources can explore initiatives under the <u>Connect Illinois program</u>. For more information and this initiative and other resources, visit the <u>Illinois Office of Broadband website</u>.

MARYLAND

The Data:

Maryland ranks 3rd among states in rankings for internet coverage, speed, and availability.

Nearly five in ten residents are not able to purchase broadband at a price of $60/month or less (excluding promotions and government programs).

- Nearly 560,000 families in Maryland eligible for affordable internet access do not have it.
- There are 206,000 African American households without wireline broadband service connection in Maryland, or nearly 40% of all disconnected households.

No Wireline Broadband 26.9%

No Affordable Internet 73.1%

State Resources:

- The Connect Maryland Initiative is aimed at bridging the digital divide by boosting broadband infrastructure, with a focus on unserved and underserved areas.
- The state has allocated nearly $92 million to enhance connectivity for approximately 14,500 households and businesses, aiming to ensure equitable access to digital services.
- The Office of Statewide Broadband has invested more than $270 million to extend high-speed internet to around 52,000 previously unserved homes and businesses.
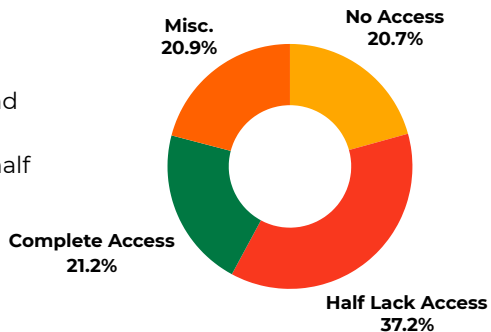
MICHIGAN

The Data:

At least 368,000 homes in Michigan lack access to broadband. This equates to 27% of households in the state with school-age children.

- Of the 1,773 municipalities in Michigan:
  - 367 (21%) have no broadband access at all.
  - 659 (37%) have more than half of their households lacking broadband access.
  - 376 (21%) have complete broadband coverage for all households.

Misc. **20.9%**

No Access **20.7%**

Complete Access **21.2%**

Half Lack Access **37.2%**

- 2 million (48%) of Michigan households do not have access to more than one broadband provider, meaning no competition or choice exists when they look for a service provider.
- 5.7 million (57%) of Michigan residents are not using the internet at broadband speeds.
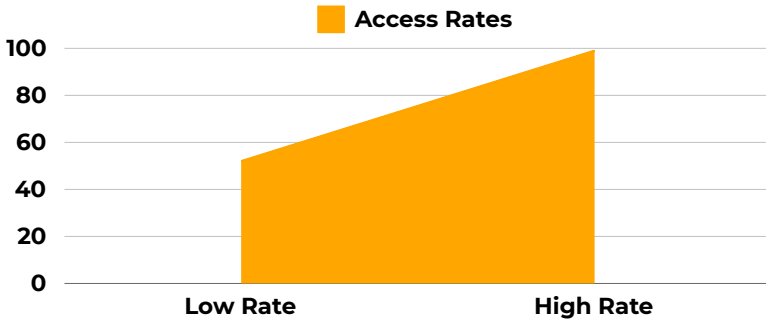
State Resources:

- For local high-speed internet service, check out Michigan broadband services for fast, reliable internet service in northern Michigan communities, including the Upper Peninsula.
- To explore broadband availability, use the State of Michigan's interactive broadband map to search broadband availability by street address and view the types of broadband available throughout Michigan.
- Michigan Broadband Services also offers residential packages, with premium, 24/7 support and bundled services to stay connected.

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NEW JERSEY

The Data:

In some of New Jersey's wealthiest counties, broadband access rates are as high as 99%, whereas in less affluent counties, the access rates can be as low as 52%

- Nearly six in ten residents are not able to purchase broadband at a price of $60/month or less (excluding promotions and government programs).

State Resources:

- The NJ Office of Broadband Connectivity oversees various initiatives aimed at improving internet accessibility. Their website has more information about their efforts and how to get connected.
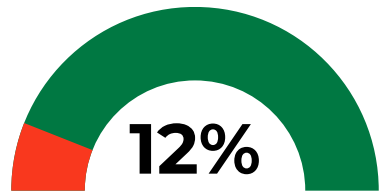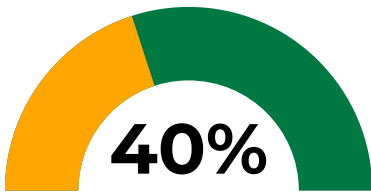
NEW YORK

The Data:
About a quarter of New York City households lack a broadband subscription at home and the percentage is even higher for Black, Hispanic, low-income, and senior households.
For some community districts — many in the Bronx and high-poverty areas — over 40% of households do not have high-speed broadband service.
Between 11 and 13 percent of NYC DOE students in each borough lack access to adequate internet at home during remote learning.

40%

12%

State Resources:
- New York State is actively working to expand broadband internet access through the ConnectALL program. This initiative aims to provide reliable, high-speed internet to all New Yorkers, especially those in rural and underserved areas. The program includes broadband deployment to enhance digital infrastructure in locations lacking adequate service, supported by strategic state and federal funding.
- Additionally, the Affordable Housing Connectivity Program focuses on installing broadband in affordable housing to improve access for low-income residents.
- New York has also developed a Digital Equity Plan to promote internet service adoption and address digital disparities, ensuring all communities can fully participate in the digital economy.
- For more information on consumer resources, visit the ConnectALL Office's consumer resources page.

NORTH CAROLINA

The Data:

North Carolina ranks 29th among states in rankings for internet coverage, speed, and availability.

6.3% of North Carolina residents do not have access to wired or fixed wireless broadband, meaning that roughly one in ten residents cannot purchase an internet plan with speeds of at least 25 Mbps download and 3Mbps upload.

66.7% of North Carolina residents do not have access to a wired low-priced broadband plan, meaning that nearly seven in ten residents cannot purchase broadband at a price point of $60/month or less (excluding promotions and government programs).

54.9% of North Carolina residents cannot purchase a fiber-optic internet plan, meaning that more than half of residents are unable to access fiber internet.

Households

No Money	▮
No Internet Service	▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
No Low Priced Service	▮▮▮▮▮▮

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70
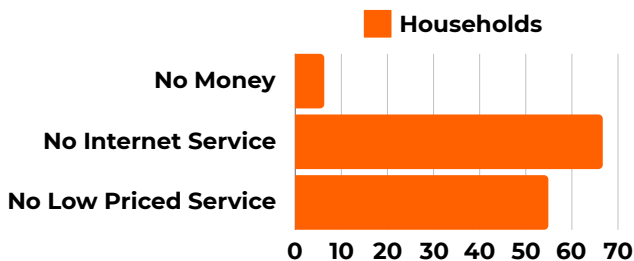
State Resources:

- This site serves as a comprehensive resource, offering broadband maps, indices, reports, and publications aimed at improving broadband access across the state.
- For Internet connectivity resources, explore the internet connectivity resources page offered by the N.C. Department of Information Technology's Broadband Infrastructure Office.
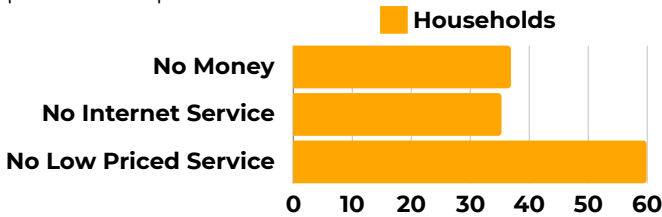
TENNESSEE

The Data:

Tennessee currently ranks 17th among states in rankings for internet coverage, speed, and availability.

36.9% of Tennessee residents are without internet service.

35.3% of Tennessee residents do not have access to a wired low-priced broadband plan of $60/month or less (excluding promotions and government programs), meaning six in ten residents cannot purchase broadband at this price point.

Over half of Tennessee residents, specifically 59.9%, cannot purchase a fiber-optic internet plan.

Households

	Households
No Money	~37
No Internet Service	~35
No Low Priced Service	~60

(Scale: 0 10 20 30 40 50 60)

State Resources:

- For a better understanding of how broadband access impacts Tennessee residents, visit the Tennessee government broadband resources page.
- If you need help with internet bills or finding affordable options, visit the Tennessee Broadband Office. This page provides resources for getting help with internet bills, discovering low-cost Wi-Fi options and devices, and accessing online skills training.
- To understand broadband accessibility legislation, check out information on the Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Act at BroadbandUSA. It outlines the state's plan to bridge broadband gaps through funding, deregulation, and other strategies.
- For rural residents looking for broadband access, learn about efforts to expand broadband to rural areas on the Rural Broadband in Tennessee - Access and Engagement page. This page discusses the challenges and solutions for bringing broadband to rural communities.
- For general support and digital inclusion efforts, visit BroadbandUSA's main page. This page offers assistance for enhancing broadband connectivity and promoting digital inclusion for governments, industry, and nonprofits.
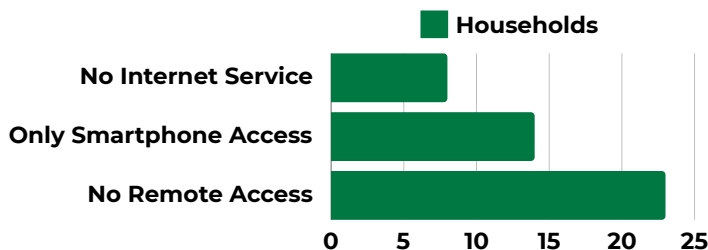
TEXAS

The Data:

Texas ranks well below national averages in three key areas of digital access: 46th in internet access and computers, 45th in broadband, and 45th in access to both broadband and computers.

More than 8% of Texas households lack internet, and another 14% only have access via smartphone, according to the U.S. Census.
Texans across 3 million households lack broadband.

23% of Texans are unable to attend online classes, see a health care provider from their living room, fill out a job application online, start a business or access online marketplaces from their kitchen table. These barriers negatively affect Texans' quality of life and limit economic opportunities for individuals and the state overall.

Fiber internet is only available to 11% of the population.

State Resources:

- The Texas Broadband Development Office (TBDO) is responsible for coordinating state-wide efforts to improve broadband access. It manages the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, which Texas received $3.3 billion to support infrastructure deployment, mapping, and adoption.
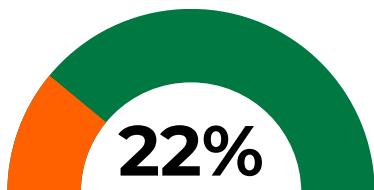
VIRGINIA

The Data:

Virginia currently ranks 9th among states in annual rankings of internet coverage, speed and availability.

While 22.9 percent of the overall Virginia population lacked broadband internet in 2019, nearly one in four people, or 23.1 percent, of racial and ethnic minorities did not have high-speed internet at home. Approximately 728,000 individuals in a racial and ethnic minority group did not have broadband internet access.

An estimated 210,039 locations are classified as unserved and below 100/20 speed, according to the service territory data submitted by internet service providers.

22%

State Resources:

- The Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) funds projects to expand broadband services to currently unserved areas, supporting telecommunications infrastructure development.
- The Line Extension Customer Assistance Program (LECAP) helps extend broadband networks to low-to-moderate income residents, ensuring they have access to necessary services.
- The Commonwealth Connection tool, developed by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, offers a detailed map of broadband availability to identify service gaps.
- Additionally, the Digital Opportunity Plan focuses on broadband adoption and affordability, implementing funding from the federal Digital Equity Act effectively.
- For more details on Virginia's broadband initiatives, visit the DHCD's broadband page.
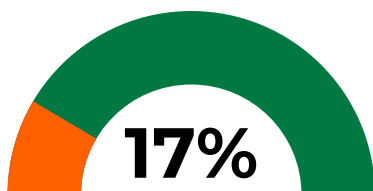
WEST VIRGINIA

The Data:
West Virginia currently ranks 50th among states rankings of internet coverage, speed and availability – making it the worst place to live for high speed internet access.
Eight in ten residents are unable to purchase a fiber internet plan.

- In West Virginia, those with low income and those with lower educational attainment have the lowest rates of access to the internet.
- 17% of West Virginians do not have access to the internet in their homes.

State Resources:
- West Virginia has developed a Digital Equity Plan aimed at addressing the digital divide by enhancing internet access and digital literacy across all communities.
- Another key initiative is the Line Extension Advancement and Development (LEAD) program, which supports the extension of broadband services to remote areas, improving internet access and reliability.
- For more detailed information about these initiatives and further resources, visit the West Virginia Broadband Office website.

BLACK CHURCHES 4 DIGITAL EQUITY: LITURGICAL RESOURCES

The Biblical requirement recorded in Micah 6:8 gives insight into Christian's responsibility to be an agent for justice:

"[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"- Micah. 6:8

This section of the Digital Equity toolkit will highlight scripture, sacred memory, historical events, current data, universal human rights and the Black prophetic religious tradition to build the capacity of local ministries to close the digital divide. The Black Church has continually embodied the call to be a community anchor institution, standing for equity and providing advocacy within underserved communities- to help the most vulnerable families get resources that they deserve. In partnership with national organizations and institutions, we are proud to offer faith-inspired tools to build a human-centered theological and moral framework to help educate and advocate for digital equity.

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DIGITAL EQUITY PRAYER:

Divine God,

We thank you for this opportunity to come together to learn, worship and activate our faith. We thank you God for bringing us into the global digital economy, where we have the potential to be connected like never before. For some, being connected is a lifeline- it's how we are able to see doctors, get medication and stay up to date with health care. For others, being connected is key to their academic careers as so many teach and learn online. For others, it is a gateway to a library, another world, a digital art exhibit or virtual training that contributes to professional development. Lord, for the growth and development of the digital economy that is designed so that we may have life and life more abundantly, we thank you.

God, we ask for wisdom in harnessing all that comes with technological advancements. Artificial intelligence is here. The metaverse is here. Depression, cyber bullying and rising trends in loneliness also pervade us, as social media perpetuates fabricated connections and hollowed out versions of community.

Help us to remember what it is to be human in the times we are in. Help us to remember that we have the power to create digitally inclusive communities, where we can allow our values and virtues to lead us in the use of technology for our good.

What we yearn now more for, more than ever, is what is real. To really be seen by one another. To foster real connections. Real communal care. Real advocacy with and for one another. Real standing in the gap, and real actions to close the divide.

Help us to be in real community with one another- connected to the life giving and life protecting resources that we deserve.

DIGITAL EQUITY PRAYER CONT'D:

Help us to be in real community with one another- advocating for access to resources for ALL. Help us to be in real community with one another- joining together to learn, teach, advocate and build so that we might all do what we can to co-create a beautifully safe, and justice-rooted, digitally inclusive ecosystem right where we are.

Give us strength God for the journey ahead, as we put our faith into action. Give us wisdom God, to reach back and get the lesson from our past to be strengthened as we move forward. Help us mobilize so that everyone has an equitable opportunity to be connected in this digital economy!

But most of all God, help us remember who we are, and whose we are, in the midst of it all. Don't let us forget to see one another. To foster real connections and be in real solidarity, as we advocate with and for one another. Help us to exercise real communal care as we listen to the underserved and most vulnerable among us, and dream and discern how we might each be called in this season to actualize digital equity, grounded by the values and virtues that guide us, in our own communities.

God who knew us before we were formed in our mother's womb. God who created us for human touch.

God who values relationship. God who loves justice.

Be with us and guide us, as we remember, rejoice and reflect.

We commit ourselves to doing what we can, through training and collaboration to grow the gifts that we have where we are, to co-create a future where all your children may thrive.

Ase and Amen.

A LITANY FOR DIGITAL EQUITY

Guide: O God of the Exodus, of Liberation & Justice, we come to you in prayer naming the digital divide as a grave injustice that continues to impact our communities today.

Community: Achieving digital equity is critical to our advancement. Only 71% of Black Families have broadband internet service at home, and only 69% of Black families have a home computer.

Guide: O God of the Exodus, of Liberation & Justice, we come to you in prayer naming the digital divide as a barrier to the ability for Black families to thrive in historically underserved and overlooked, urban and rural communities alike.

Community: Achieving digital equity opens the door to educational and economic opportunities, and yet 26 million homes in urban areas, and 10 million households in rural areas do not have broadband internet access.

Guide: O God of the Exodus, of Liberation & Justice, we come to you in prayer naming digital equity as a labor justice issue that has far reaching implications for the future of the workforce.

Community: Achieving digital equity is critical to building digital literacy and growing digital proficiencies, and yet only 50% of Black workers say they have proficient or advanced digital skills.

Guide: O God of the Exodus, of Liberation & Justice, you tell us that we are made in your image. We believe that all people, regardless of race, religion, or immigration status have inherent dignity because you made us. Our God-given dignity demands inclusion, access and equity.

A LITANY FOR DIGITAL EQUITY CONT'D

Community: Achieving digital equity is critical to building communities that thrive. Our God- given dignity tells us that we are worthy of access.

Guide: The United Nations General Assembly declared access to the Internet a basic human right in 2016. Yet millions of people in the USA still have no home access to high-speed Internet or access to a device.

Community: Achieving digital equity and closing the digital divide is a human rights issue.

Guide: What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

ALL: Please strengthen us Lord as we stand on the side of justice and educate about digital equity. Please strengthen us Lord as we embody justice and advocate for dismantling barriers to digital access. Please strengthen us Lord with connections, collaborations, trainings and resources that would enable us to actualize a just future as we all play our part in co-creating digitally inclusive ecosystems within our communities.

We trust in you God of Justice and we believe another way is possible!

Amen and Ase.
(Micah 6:8 ESV)

Sources:
Blackchurches4DigitalEquity: https://www.blackchurches4digitalequity.com
Digital Inclusion 101: https://www.digitalinclusion.org/digital-inclusion-101/
Universal Declaration of Human Rights: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

SANKOFA STUDY

THEME: REMEMBERING, REJOICING & REFLECTING

SCRIPTURE: *"SO FAITH BY ITSELF, IF IT HAS NO WORKS, IS DEAD."* JAMES 2:17 NRSV

TAKE-AWAY: The Black church is a value creating institution that affirms the humanity & dignity of the oppressed. The Black church was critical for all major movements for social change including the labor movement & the modern civil rights movement. This moment calls for us all to embody the faith we proclaim to take the steps to envision, dream, & act as funding opportunities will be made available to close the digital divide.

Moderated Lesson:

Introduction

The fight for equity remains at the heartbeat of both the labor movement and the modern civil rights movement of the 20th century. Our democracy functions at its highest potential when every citizen -- irrespective of their race, gender, political philosophy, ethnicity, or economic class -- is granted the unvarnished, unencumbered opportunity to have their human rights honored and to have equal access to resources, opportunities and technologies.

The Universal Declaration of IInternational Human Rights established by the United Nations (UN) are an outward expression of. the values and virtues we all -- the citizens of this republic -- cherish and seek to actualize in the public square. Recognizing the key role that a global and open internet plays in supporting thriving communities, the UN named universal access to the Internet as a human right. Yet here in the US, 36 million families still do not have access to broadband internet- with Black, Latino and indigenous communities being the most likely to not have broadband service at home. Struggling for the right to access resources is a part of a struggle for dignity and recognition of humanity. Black freedom fighters argued from the premise that all people are made in the image and likeness of God. The fight for digital equity is intricately connected to the fight for recognition as a child of God.

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SANKOFA STUDY CONT'D

Sankofa Moment: Do Not Forget the Past

Dr. Fallon Wilson (curator of Black Churches 4 Digital Equity) reminds us is her article entitled "The Public Interest Technology Field Must Embrace Blackness, Faith & Justice to Build a Liberatory Future for All in the Age of AI" that the past is being erased amidst a retrenchment of racism and bigotry that has been ongoing for years in the US. Dr. Wilson suggests that although we may live in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), we also live in a time where the erasure of history is the norm, and where in many Southern states book chapters on American slavery are being banned from primary and secondary schools. We live in a time where the US Supreme Court, stocked with conservative judges, has created the conditions for employers and universities to discontinue the work of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. And we live in a moment where any gains made by protestors and activists advancing the claim that "Black Lives Matter" are being rolled back.

Dr. Wilson reminds us that understanding history is necessary to fight back against the phenomenon of oppressive systems becoming enshrined in code and technological infrastructure. The virtues we uphold for freedom and justice for all, that have been informed by our religious teachings, upheld by our rich history and declared by Universal Human Rights, can undergird us as we dream about what is possible. The Black churches rich legacy as a community anchor institution can guide us in creating an alternative vision of a technological society that is not oppressive. Dr. Wilson provides lessons from two Black freedom movements that are helpful in guiding our ability to remember what is possible. Unearthing these examples will allow us to bring our faith and works into a fruitful relationship with sacred memory to fuel our imagination as we dare to develop a connected and equitable future.

SANKOFA STUDY CONT'D

Remembering (2 Examples from the Black Freedom Movement):

Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: In 1925, A. Philip Randolph founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) to improve the working conditions of Black porters, who were denied entry into the white Unions. This act of resistance to discriminatory and oppressive working conditions helped improve the financial standing and health of Black porters and helped set into motion seeds of our modern-day Civil Rights Movement. As a critical point in this history lesson, Black men founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) without the scientific knowledge that for a 1920's "Super Power" locomotive train to work, an "increased size of a firebox . . . [larger than any given boiler size during that time] . . . was needed to achieve a high horsepower and high speed. A. Philip Randolph and the other porters were not educated as train engineers. However, that did not stop them from organizing against discrimination, because they were experts in justice.

Women's Political Council: A man named Edgar D. Nixon, a Pullman porter and leader of the local BSCP chapter in Montgomery, Alabama, later created a partnership with the Women's Political Council, which launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1955, JoAnn Robinson, president of the Women's Political Council, under the founding leadership of Mary Fair Burks, launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Often, when we tell the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, we lead with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 's leadership, but the foundation and organization of the boycott came from JoAnn Robinson and other Black women who were members of the Women's Political Council. Together, Edgar Nixon and JoAnn Robinson chose Rosa Parks to be the face of the bus boycott. For a year, Black people did not ride the bus in Montgomery because of the discriminatory practices. This yearlong protest, along with the Supreme Court case concerning Montgomery discriminatory bus practices, gave fire to a rising Civil Rights Movement in the US. But

SANKOFA STUDY CONT'D

to achieve these outcomes, Jo Ann Robinson, Edgar Nixon, and other Black people did not need to know how buses worked, or much about the future of transportation. The Women's Political Council were not educated as bus engineers. However, that did not stop them from organizing against discrimination, because they were experts in justice.

Rejoicing: We have a deep history to pull from as a roadmap, guiding our path as we move forward. We have a deep well to draw from for inspiration and wisdom. In the provided examples, our ancestors, Dr. Wilson reminds us that just two generations from slavery, living in the Jim Crow era, knew, firsthand, what injustice looked like. It looked like "strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees" in the words sung by Billie Holiday. It looked like hungry Black families in rural Southern counties during the Great Depression. It looked like 14-year-old Emmett Till with a bludgeoned face in a child casket. Yet, they persisted and revolutionized transportation and

drastically changed everyday American life. We can look back, remember and rejoice because this is our generational lineage- Black people both fought for fair treatment in the labor associated with building these technologies, and they also used these technologies in their fight for civil rights, because they believed in justice. They activated their faith.

Reflecting: If we want a better future, expertise in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer science are important, but they alone cannot make justice live and breathe for us. As our ancestors did, we have to activate our faith. In the provided examples, Dr. Wilson illustrates how The Women's Political Council and the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters led with justice. They were drawn to freedom. They used science in the service of freedom, like many other Black freedom fighters before them, such as Harriet Tubman who used the stars in the sky and the pictographics on quilts to navigate enslaved Black people to freedom.

SANKOFA STUDY CONT'D

Again, these examples show us how to activate faith in another way possible, directed science in the service of freedom. Faith empowered actions for justice. Technological possibilities were harnessed by faith-rooted, justice minded African Americans, to create a more equitable, expansive and accessible future possibilities.

Dr. Wilson shows us that through joining the Digital Equity movement, we have a divine opportunity - to embody faith and justice, rooted in the struggles and triumphs of past civil rights movements, in order to guide us in creating a technological society that uplifts, empowers, and recognizes the richness of Black communities.

Together, let's put our faith to work in closing the digital divide! History teaches us, this power is already within us!

Ase and Amen.

☐ **Prompts for Vision-Casting: Remember, Reflect & Rejoice**
Scripture teaches us faith without works is dead. In this lesson we were reminded about how the Black freedom movement, founded on a living and active faith, reckoned with science and technology and improved our well-being. **Can you think of other examples?**

☐ **What role can our congregation or organization play in becoming a catalyst for a local digital equity ecosystem in our community?**
Remember, achieving digital equity begins with having a high-speed broadband internet connection. But it also requires devices like laptops, tablets and phones connected to the internet along with the digital skills people need to take full advantage of opportunities online. Every member of our community should share in these opportunities, and we all have a role to play in dismantling barriers to access.

SANKOFA STUDY CONT'D

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Sources:

1. https://www.techpolicy.press/the-public-interest-technology-field-must-embrace-blackness-faith-justice-to-build-a-liberatory-future-for-all-in-the-age-of-ai/
2. https://tcf.org/content/report/disconnected-digital-divide-harms-workers-can/
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FRAMING THE MOMENT: PASTOR'S NOTES

The way we frame the urgency of this moment is critical. As pastors and leaders of faith institutions, we need you to use your voice to tell this story. As you are empowered with data, information and liturgical resources, we wanted to provide you with a few examples from pastors who have been on the frontlines of the Black Churches 4 Digital Equity movement. In their own unique ways, these pastors have connected dots and have given voice to the heart of this issue within their communities. As you consider how you will use your voice to advocate, prompts are provided below for your consideration as you write, organize and speak.

Rev. William Lamar IV, Pastor, Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church:

"You cannot live abundantly nor flourish as a human being, black or otherwise, if you do not have connectivity. If you don't have connectivity, or if you did not have connectivity during the guts of the pandemic, your children were not being educated. If you don't have it right now, it's hard for you to have access to your money, it's hard for you to gain credit, it's hard for you to connect with your family. It's hard for you to be entertained. It's hard for you to participate in worship in community... We must mobilize so that black people can participate, not be cut out of the digital economy, not be cut out of connectivity because to do so is to cut us and others away from human thriving and that's not the goal of our faith nor is it the goal of at least the rhetoric of this nation's values."

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FRAMING THE MOMENT: PASTOR'S NOTES

Prompts for Thought:

- **Don't Count Us Out**- Government's Role in Protecting Broadband Customers
- **Thriving Together**- Congregations Confronting Barriers to Digital Access and Digital Equity.

Rev. Dr. Renita Weems, Co-Pastor, Ray of Hope Community Church:

"*You have to be connected in order to get the services that are available. In the communities, the conversations that are going, the jobs, knowing about your finance, getting the health information you need and I want to enter into that area right now because I think that we tend to think of the broadband issue and why Black churches ought to be advocates and involved and invested because we're online and we want our people to have access to us.*"

Prompts for Thought:

- **Making Space For Us All At the Table-** Connecting Digital Literacy to the Adult Learning Ecosystems
- **We Are The Village-** Digital Access and Communal Care

FRAMING THE MOMENT: PASTOR'S NOTES

Rev. Dr. Leslie Callahan, Board Member, Woman Preach:

"Being able to access the internet was a lifeline for me as a parent… we were hearing about students in parking lots of fast-food restaurants and even in parking lots of schools that was one of the interventions that the district actually offered, that you know sort of get near a place. That's a justice issue. The Black church has always been a place where literacy and education were valued and where we were the purveyors in those spaces where the access in other places was not present. Sunday School wasn't just about the Bible. Bible study wasn't just about the Bible. It was also about education more broadly. So, I am concerned, both as a parent and as a pastor about what it means for our students not to have access to the things they needed then, and quite frankly they still need in order to be able to be educated. We don't have snow days in Philadelphia anymore, we just go online. Well, if you weren't online before, then you're not online now. If you didn't have that access before, you still don't have it now."

Prompts for Thought:

☐ **Community Collaboration for Digital Health Equity**

☐ **Beyond the Bible-** Expanding Access to Libraries to Enrich Our Communities

BLACK CHURCHES 4 DIGITAL EQUITY: APPLICATION TO MINISTRY

How to get Started:

We can work together to comprehend the full spectrum of the churches' capacity. This involves understanding not just the physical resources, like available space for computer labs or internet infrastructure, but also the human resources—the volunteers, leaders, and community members who could drive this initiative forward.

The types of resources that would help us understand capacity:

- **Human Resources:** The availability of volunteers or staff within the churches who are tech-savvy or could be trained, including the potential for hosting on-site technologists.
- **Physical Resources:** Existing infrastructure that could support programs, such as community halls, meeting rooms, and available technology.
- **Previous Outreach Successes:** Historical data on successful community outreach programs that could provide a blueprint for digital literacy initiatives.

- **Financial Capacity:** An assessment of the financial resources available or needed, identifying potential areas where state funding could fill gaps.
- **Existing Programs:** A look into current programs supporting covered populations, providing insights into how digital equity efforts can be integrated or expanded upon.
- **Reach and Geographic Targets:** Understanding the communities the churches serve, their locations, and the demographics of their congregations.
- **Vision for the Future:** The churches' goals and aspirations for the next five years, especially those related to community support and technology access.

BC4DE: APPLICATION TO MINISTRY CONT'D

Examples for Congregations:

For Churches with limited resources or technological infrastructure.

- Providing Wi-Fi access, particularly after work hours and on the weekends
- Leverage the strong community ties and trust within churches to conduct outreach and/or organize virtual events, distribute informational materials, and use platforms (like newsletters, social media, and sermons) to educate the congregation about the importance of digital literacy and broadband adoption.
- Help drive enrollment for community programs (skills training, workshops, workforce opportunities, etc.) by sharing outreach materials with church members
- Help promote and disseminate surveys that gather insights into the barriers to digital access and literacy, learning preferences, and specific needs of the covered populations

For Churches with some resources and volunteer support.

- Serve as a Community Digital Hub that hosts virtual or small-scale in-person digital literacy sessions, operates as an information center for broadband adoption, and guides accessing online services.
- If a computer lab is available, provide open computer lab time to community members
- In partnership with nonprofit organizations, host a device donation drive or community device distribution
- Host computer classes or workshops, leveraging volunteers from the congregation or partnering organizations.
- Provide recording or live-streaming of services and programs to community members and include live captions and translation
- Organize community roundtables and discussions for feedback and community insights on technology access and skills

BC4DE: APPLICATION TO MINISTRY CONT'D

Examples for Congregations:

For Churches with significant resources and a strong volunteer base.

- Create well-equipped flexible learning spaces for community education and training within church facilities
- Implement a digital navigator program with church members by mobilizing volunteers to provide one-on-one support, tutoring, and mentoring for individuals needing assistance with digital skills (such as seniors, individuals with disabilities, or those with language barriers, ensuring personalized support that addresses unique challenges)
- Employ dedicated leadership staff or teams that could form strategic community partnerships with local schools, libraries, and tech companies to expand digital access and co-implement educational programs specifically designed to meet the needs of the covered populations

Examples for Community Organizations (to help build the capacity of faith-based organizations)

1. Provide targeted training and capacity-building workshops on digital literacy and program management for church leaders and volunteers. This could involve online webinar series, toolkits, and resources that help them understand the digital divide's implications and learn how to organize and advocate for digital inclusion.
2. Assist churches in applying for grants specifically designed for digital inclusion projects. This could include funding for purchasing devices to loan out, support staffing for digital navigators, or setting up mobile or pop-up digital labs. Offer technical support and guidance on setting up and managing these technologies.
3. Support on-site technologists or dedicated church staff members trained to support digital literacy programs and partnerships. These individuals would liaise

BC4DE: APPLICATION TO MINISTRY CONT'D

Examples for Community Organizations:

between the churches and community-based digital equity initiatives, ensuring that programs are effectively implemented and aligned with community needs. Their responsibilities could include:

- Coordinating events, workshops, and training sessions.
- Managing device loaner programs or mobile digital labs.
- Providing technical expertise and community engagement as a part of the church leadership
- Facilitating partnerships with community organizations, libraries, schools, and tech companies.
- Assisting in the application process for grants and additional funding opportunities.
- Providing ongoing technical support and troubleshooting for digital tools and resources.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DIGITAL EQUITY- ENVISIONING WORKSHEET

During the breakout session, we'll seek to answer the following questions:

What does it mean to educate for digital equity?

Understanding the critical role that that African American Churches have played across the span of revolutions, what role can congregations and faith-inspired organizations play in building and informing digital equity initiatives?

How can your congregation or organization engage educational and skill-building efforts for digital equity?

DIGITAL EQUITY TIMELINE

We welcome you to partner with **Black Churches 4 Digital Equity** Coalition as we move forward in building capacity for congregations to tap into funding resources available for closing the Digital Divide. This toolkit will be updated with data pertaining to every state– please stay in touch with **Black Churches 4 Digital Equity** Coalition as we add to this resource.

DIGITAL EQUITY
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