



Digital Equity Projects

This document provides specific guidance for **digital equity projects**, or those that address matters of affordability, capacity, and digital adoption to improve economic outcomes in underserved communities.

ARC's strategic plan emphasizes strategic focus, collaboration, sustainability, and measurable impact in its investments. Digital Equity projects must align with these principles and demonstrate how they will promote the productive and strategic use of broadband to strengthen economic competitiveness.

Examples of Digital Equity projects that ARC may fund include, but are not limited to:

- Planning study to explore options for a single district or a cluster of communities that lack broadband - study would assess the existing and future broadband needs, potential solutions, and costs for implementation.
- Programs that conduct outreach related to affordable internet access to low-income households.
- Digital literacy and training programs to help individuals and businesses develop the skills necessary to access and effectively use broadband technologies.
- Partnerships with community organizations and local governments to provide digital resources, such as computer labs and mobile technology units, to underserved communities.
- Loans to small businesses to help them establish or improve their online presence and e-commerce capabilities.

Digital Equity projects may involve multiple activities as part of a single project. ARC encourages applicants to review the specific guidance for each type of activity included in an application. Applicants must demonstrate the potential impact of their proposed projects and provide a clear and detailed budget and implementation plan.

ARC encourages applicants to consider how their projects can leverage other funding sources and resources to maximize the impact of their investments. Projects that demonstrate collaboration and partnerships with other organizations and stakeholders will receive priority consideration.

Key Principles of ARC Digital Equity Investments:

As outlined in ARC's strategic plan, activities should be strategic, collaborative, sustainable, and impactful.

Strategic:

- Describe how the project supports a regional strategy or plan to promote digital equity and adoption. Project should not duplicate existing programs or initiatives.
- Feasibility and planning studies related to digital equity should assess the existing social infrastructure and identify potential opportunities to increase affordability and digital adoption.

Sustainable:

- Depending on the project activity, applicants should explain how the project will be maintained after grant funds are used. Identify the departments or organizations responsible for project activities and describe their capacity to handle project management.

Collaborative:

- Identify all project partners, including local, regional, state and federal entities that will support the project, and any service providers.

Impactful:

More Information

For general guidance on how to develop a complete and competitive application for ARC project funding, all applicants should refer to the application framework and instructions detailed in the [Checklist for ARC Non-Construction Project Applications](#) form or the [Checklist for ARC Construction Project Applications](#) form, as appropriate, available in the applicant resources section of our website.

Applicants should also consult their ARC State Program Manager*, their state's Appalachian Development Plan* and Annual Strategy Statement* for additional information.

*This information can be found [HERE](#) by navigating to the page and clicking on the appropriate state link.

- How will the project benefit the community and/or businesses and residents?
- Provide quantifiable output and outcome measures consistent with ARC's Guide for Performance Measures. Examples of suitable measures could include the number of homes or businesses expected to benefit from a new digital literacy program or the number of students participating in a device loan program.

Other Considerations:

- In accordance with federal procurement rules, all services related to Digital Equity must be competitively bid. This might include digital literacy training programs, outreach programs, affordability awareness programs, etc.
- The grantee must retain an ownership interest in all grant-funded equipment or materials developed as part of the project (curricula, outreach materials, digital resources, etc.).
- Contractors that are hired to plan and design a project are prohibited from bidding on the project's implementation.
- ARC Code states: ARC grant assistance shall not be used for projects that promote unfair competition between businesses with the same immediate service area.
- Many of ARC's grant programs require applicants to receive a coordination letter from their respective state broadband office to ensure that their projects are aligned with state digital equity plans.

Helpful Resources:

- National Broadband Resource Hub <https://www.broadbandhub.org/>
- NTIA Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-programs/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program>
- National Digital Inclusion Alliance <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/>