ACHIEVING DIGITAL EQUITY IN NEW YORK:

An Outline for Collaborative Change
BACKGROUND

- Disparities Around Income and Race
- Digital Equity and Schools
- Government Efforts to Address Digital Inequity
DISPARITIES AROUND INCOME AND RACE

Poor New Yorkers, older adults, and communities of color have low adoption rates of digital tools.

- Half of New York's lowest income residents (annual income under $25,000) do not have a wireline broadband subscription and half lack a computer.

- 40% of older (65+) New Yorkers do not have wireline subscriptions for internet service and about one-third do not have a computer.

- One-third of African American and Latino households do not have wireline broadband at home and similar numbers do not have a desktop or laptop computer.
DIGITAL EQUITY AND SCHOOLS

The State Education Department conducted surveys of NYS schools in the Spring and Fall of 2020 to measure students’ access to the internet and devices. 99% of NYS schools responded.

- NYS schools, districts and BOCES have provided hundreds of thousands of devices to our New York State students over the past year for home use.

- As of January 2021, approximately 93% of students in New York have internet access and 91% have devices to support virtual learning.

- The survey results indicate that the most effective digital equity work can happen at the local level, through partnerships and collaboration.
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO ADDRESS DIGITAL INEQUALITY

The ARPA Rescue Plan of 2021 allocates $350 billion to state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments for the purpose of "laying the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery."

- The NYS 20/21 Budget includes a requirement that internet service providers offer $15 or less monthly cost for low-income consumer access to broadband services.

- The Budget also requires the Public Service Commission to study and map out availability, reliability, and cost of high-speed internet and broadband services.

- The Budget sets aside $15 million in federal funding to allow the SED to implement a program to provide resources and technical support for individuals and households who are economically disadvantaged.
OUTLINE FOR COLLABORATIVE CHANGE

- State-level prioritization of Digital Inclusion work
- Thriving Digital Equity Ecosystems Across the Entire State
- A Shift from Digital Equity to Digital Justice
Digital Inclusion: Activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and can make use of information and communications technologies.

**STATE-LEVEL PRIORITIZATION OF DIGITAL INCLUSION WORK**

**STRATEGIES**

- Develop outreach channels to help eligible populations sign up for the federal internet subsidy program and similar programs.
- Map digital inclusion assets and resources available at regional, state, and federal levels.
- Develop a statewide Digital Navigator training program for libraries and their community partners.
- Establish a State-level presence to coordinate statewide efforts to target and eliminate digital equity gaps.
THRIVING DIGITAL EQUITY ECOSYSTEMS ACROSS THE ENTIRE STATE

Closing digital equity gaps will require the coordination, cooperation, and the intentional capacity-building of the many organizations supporting digital inclusion across New York.

STRATEGIES

• Build open and accessible digital equity data portal.

• Develop and support place-based digital equity coalitions.

• Create regional or local digital equity plans.

• Shift digital inclusion priority efforts from building-restricted WiFi and device loaning models to household internet and device ownership models.
A SHIFT FROM DIGITAL EQUITY TO DIGITAL JUSTICE

It's impossible to separate the root causes of digital inequity from the root causes of racism, opportunity gaps, and other systems of oppression.

STRATEGIES

• Develop a diversity, equity, and inclusion framework to guide the development and evaluation of digital equity work.

• Center racial equity as a driver of the work, not just an outcome of the work.

• Allow broadband infrastructure funds to support community-driven networking solutions.

• Make available data demonstrating the effectiveness of broadband infrastructure investments.
NEXT STEPS

• Advance the digital equity priorities established in the Outline for Collaborative Change
• Distribute CARES Act and ARPA funding to libraries and cultural organizations.
• Continue to nurture partnerships
• Prepare State and partners to make good use of federal funding.
The Institute of Museum and Library Services has provided the New York State Library with $6,213,213 in federal ARPA funds through the LSTA Grants to States Program.

The State Library has allocated $5,514,315 of these federal funds to New York State’s nine regional Reference and Research Library Resources Councils for collaborative regional projects that will advance digital inclusion and expand student access to digital resources.
LOOKING BACK ON
2020/2021

• Funding cuts restored.

• RBDB Regulatory amendments were finalized.

• 15-million-dollar digital inclusion fund enacted in the budget.

• Library Aid Technical Amendments were passed by the legislature.

• NYSL received $2M in CARES Act and $6.2 in ARP Act funding, most of which distributed to library systems.
LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021/2022

OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK TOGETHER!

• Need Governor to sign technical amendments.

• $15M Digital Inclusion Fund to be released.

• Help us make ARPA funds a success!

• Regents Legislative priorities will be set in late 2021. Ongoing commitment to Construction Aid program.

• Revised Library District Toolkit coming soon
LOOKING BEYOND NEXT YEAR

- RAC Vision and Plan
- LSTA Five-Year Plan
RESOURCES AND LINKS

- Emergency Connectivity Fund: https://www.emergencyconnectivityfund.org/
- Emergency Broadband Benefit: https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit
THANK YOU!