The Digital Equity Act
New Federal Funding and What it Means for WIOA Partners

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Illinois Workforce WIOA Wednesdays
November 30, 2022

Today's agenda

➢ Get an overview of the Digital Equity Act and how it relates to the WIOA system

➢ Find out how to get engaged in State Digital Equity Planning

➢ Learn more about employer demand for digital skills, workers' digital skill levels, and digital upskilling practices

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NSC's Vision

➢ Jobs that require skills training are the backbone of our economy

➢ National Skills Coalition fights for a national commitment to inclusive, high-quality skills training so that more people have access to have a better life, and more local businesses see sustained growth

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Our vision for digital equity

Consider signing on to our **Digital Equity @ Work principles:**

1. High quality hardware in all hands
2. Every community connected
3. A digital skill foundation for all
4. Upskilling for every worker in every workplace
5. Rapid reskilling for rapid re-employment

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The pandemic made clear:

Everyone needs digital skills.

Digital skill demands are growing across industries and occupations:

➢ **Construction** workers using mobile apps for work-order changes

➢ **Home health aides** using tablet computers to log patient information

➢ **Truck drivers** submitting payroll records via smartphone

➢ **Manufacturing** workers building expertise with "cobots" (collaborative robots)

➢ **Retail** workers using point-of-sale systems and inventory-control apps

➢ **Warehouse** workers using logistics software

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But until last year, federal workforce policy on digital skills was **lagging behind reality**.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (IIJA) changed that.

IIJA included the Digital Equity Act

➢ **$2.75 billion** over five years, distributed via the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

➢ Includes both *formula funding* and *competitive grants*

➢ Senate co-sponsors Murray, Portman, and King ensured workforce and education woven throughout Digital Equity Act

➢ Read the **full legislative text**

IIJA also included $42.5 billion for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program

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Digital Equity Act funding timeline *(anticipated)*

➢ **Fall 2022:** States begin 12-month Digital Equity **planning process**

➢ **Late 2023:** NTIA releases Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for $1.44 billion in *formula funds* to states ("Digital Equity Capacity Grants")

➢ **Early 2024:** NOFO for $1.25 billion in *competitive grants* to states and other eligible entities ("Digital Equity Competitive Grants")

BEAD funding will also be disbursed to states during a roughly parallel timeframe.

Your state is about to receive its Digital Equity Act and BEAD planning grants....
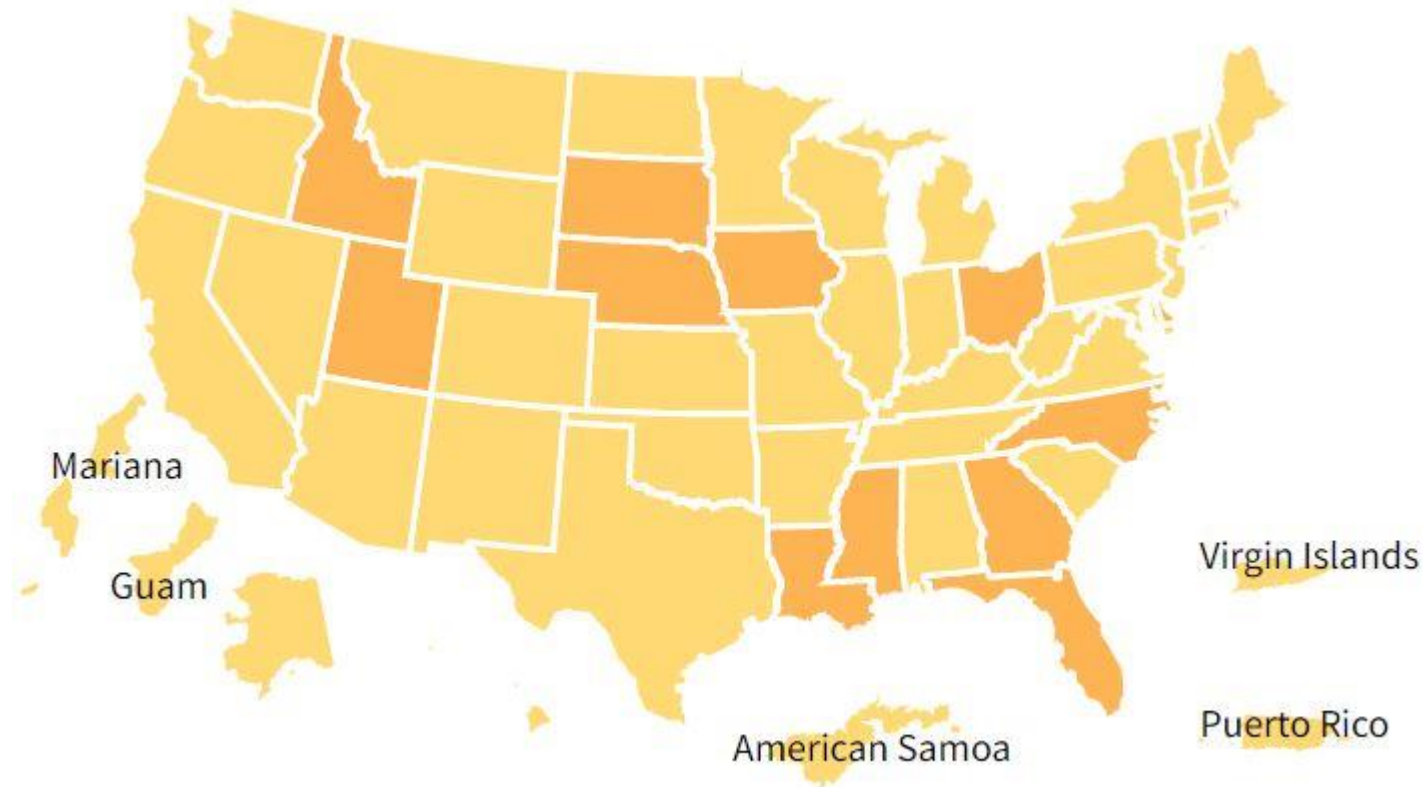
What's the next step?

➤ Last summer, each state's governor had to identify which state agency will be their administering entity

➤ The administering entity has 12 months after the planning grant is awarded to develop the State Digital Equity Plan

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Illinois has not yet received its DE Planning Grant

Mariana

Guam

Virgin Islands

American Samoa

Puerto Rico

NTIA's map shows key IL contacts

Illinois

BEAD Program Status
Planning Application Submitted

CONTACT INFORMATION

Federal Program Officer:
Greg Claus
gclaus@ntia.gov

State Broadband Officer:
Matt Schmit
Matt.Schmit@Illinois.gov

www.internetforall.gov/interactive-map

Why does this planning period matter?

➢State 5-year Digital Equity Plans will form the **roadmap for $1.44 billion in funding** for digital skills classes + more – money that could come to workforce and education programs with *no* WIOA strings.

➢State 5-year BEAD plans will be setting the parameters for investment in **broadband workforce development** programs – which *could* include adult education providers as on-ramps via pre-apprenticeships, Integrated Education and Training, etc.

State DE Plans must show how they will close equity gaps for covered populations.

Many DE "covered populations" overlap with those served by WIOA

➤ Individuals in a household with *income below 150 percent of poverty* level

➤ *Aging* individuals

➤ *Incarcerated* individuals *(other than individuals who are incarcerated in a Federal correctional facility)*

➤ *Veterans*

➤ Individuals with *disabilities*

➤ Individuals with a language barrier, including individuals who are *English learners*; and have *low levels of literacy*;

➤ Individuals who are members of a *racial or ethnic minority* group; and

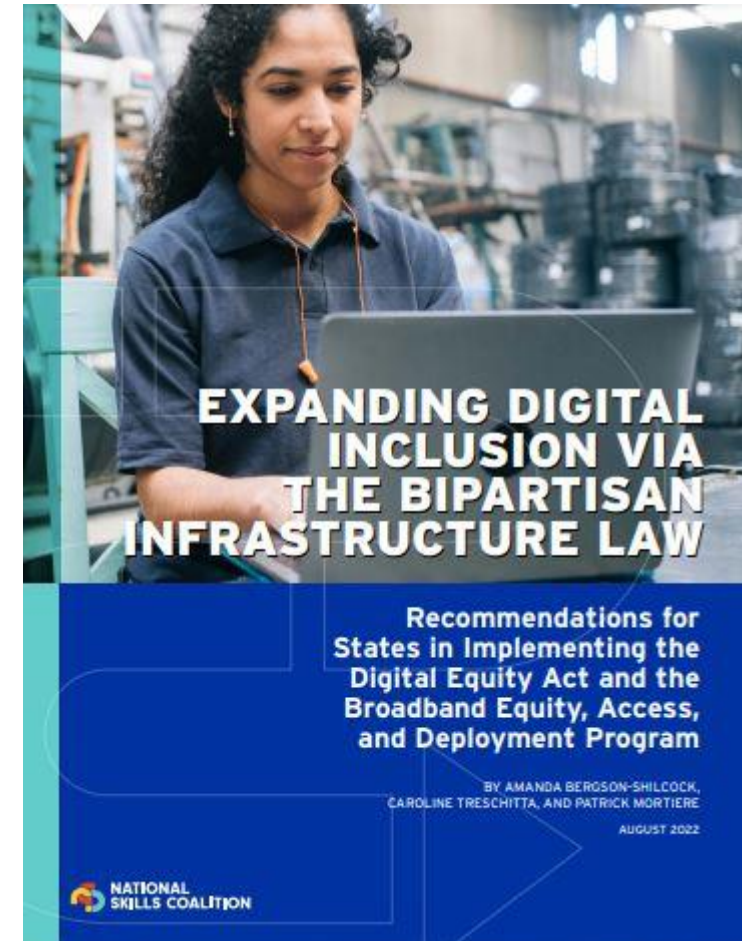➤ Individuals who primarily reside in a *rural* area

Are you already at the planning table with your state agency peers?

If **yes**, these recommendations may help:

➤ If **no**, what data, expertise, or relationships can help you get a seat at the table?

EXPANDING DIGITAL INCLUSION VIA THE BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE LAW

Recommendations for States in Implementing the Digital Equity Act and the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program

BY AMANDA BERGSON-SHILCOCK, CAROLINE TRESCHITTA, AND PATRICK MORTIERE

AUGUST 2022

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What comes after Digital Equity Planning?

➢ State Digital Equity Capacity Grants ($1.44 billion over 5 years)

➢ Each state's administering entity will receive this ***formula funding*** in late 2023 and will re-grant it to local partners

➢ We don't know yet how states will manage this process (e.g., a Request for Proposals?)

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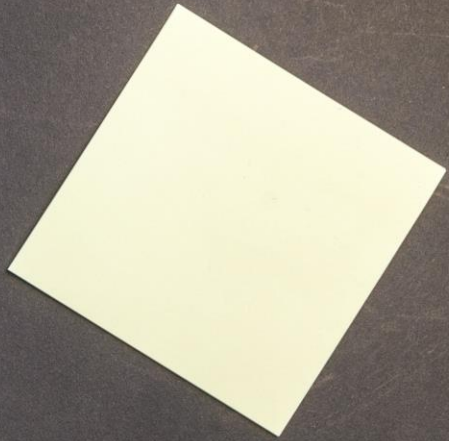
Start now to plan for the forthcoming *federal* grant competition.

In addition to state formula funding, NTIA will be making $1.25B in competitive grants

Entities eligible to apply directly to the federal government for grants:

- ➢ A political subdivision, agency, or instrumentality of a State
- ➢ An Indian Tribe, an Alaska Native entity, or a Native Hawaiian organization
- ➢ A foundation, corporation, institution, or association that is a not-for-profit entity and not a school
- ➢ A community anchor institution
- ➢ A local educational agency
- ➢ An entity that carries out a workforce development program
- ➢ A partnership between any of the preceding entities
- ➢ A partnership between any of the preceding entities and an entity that the Assistant Secretary determines to be in the public interest; and is not a school *(Cannot be or have been an administering entity under the Capacity Grant Program)*

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Entities receiving federal <u>competitive grants</u> must engage in at least <u>one</u> of these activities:

➢ (i) To develop and implement digital inclusion activities that benefit covered populations.

➢ (ii) To facilitate the adoption of broadband by covered populations in order to provide educational and employment opportunities to those populations.

➢ (iii) To implement, consistent with the purposes of this title— **(I) training programs for covered populations that cover basic, advanced, and applied skills; or (II) other workforce development programs.**

➢ (iv) To make available equipment, instrumentation, networking capability, hardware and software, or digital network technology for broadband services to covered populations at low or no cost.

➢ (v) To construct, upgrade, expend, or operate new or existing public access computing centers for covered populations through community anchor institutions.

➢ (vi) To undertake any other project and activity that the Assistant Secretary finds to be consistent with the purposes for which the Program is established.

Reminder: the Digital Equity Act defines key terms

➢ *DIGITAL INCLUSION* (A) means the activities that are necessary to ensure that all individuals in the United States have access to, and the use of, affordable information and communication technologies, such as: (i) reliable fixed and wireless broadband internet service; (ii) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; and (iii) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration; and (B) includes— *(i) obtaining access to digital literacy training*; (ii) the provision of quality technical support; and (iii) obtaining basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity.

➢ *DIGITAL LITERACY* means the skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information.

Let's bring it back to people.

Many WIOA system partners are already teaching digital skills...

...via adult education & workforce services:

➢ *Foundational (basic) digital skills.* These skills include everything from how to use a mouse to installing a new app on your smart phone. They are sometimes referred to as "digital literacy," and should be taught in a way that helps people acquire overall **digital resilience** rather than memorizing a specific set of tasks.

➢ *Industry-specific or occupational digital skills.* These skills differ dramatically depending on the type of job that a person is doing. A certified nurse aide might need to be familiar with Epic electronic health record software; a construction worker with blueprint and project-management apps; and a cybersecurity analyst with network architecture.
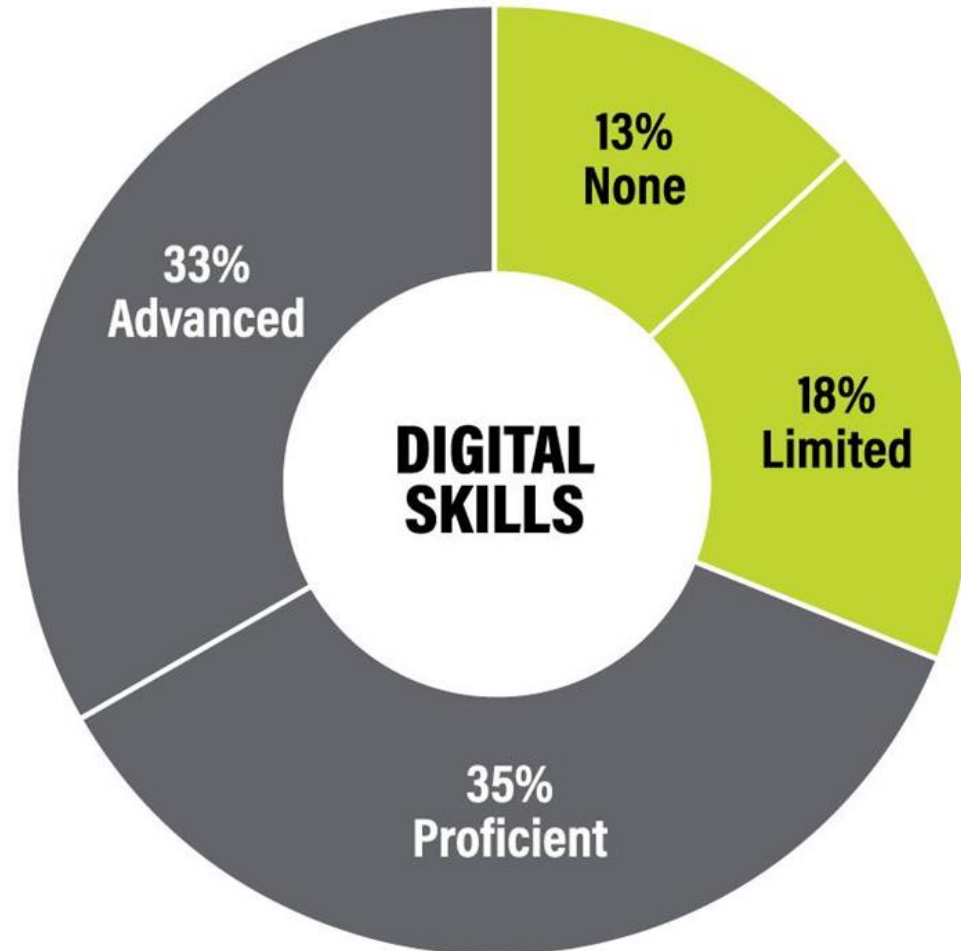
Let's set the foundation first.
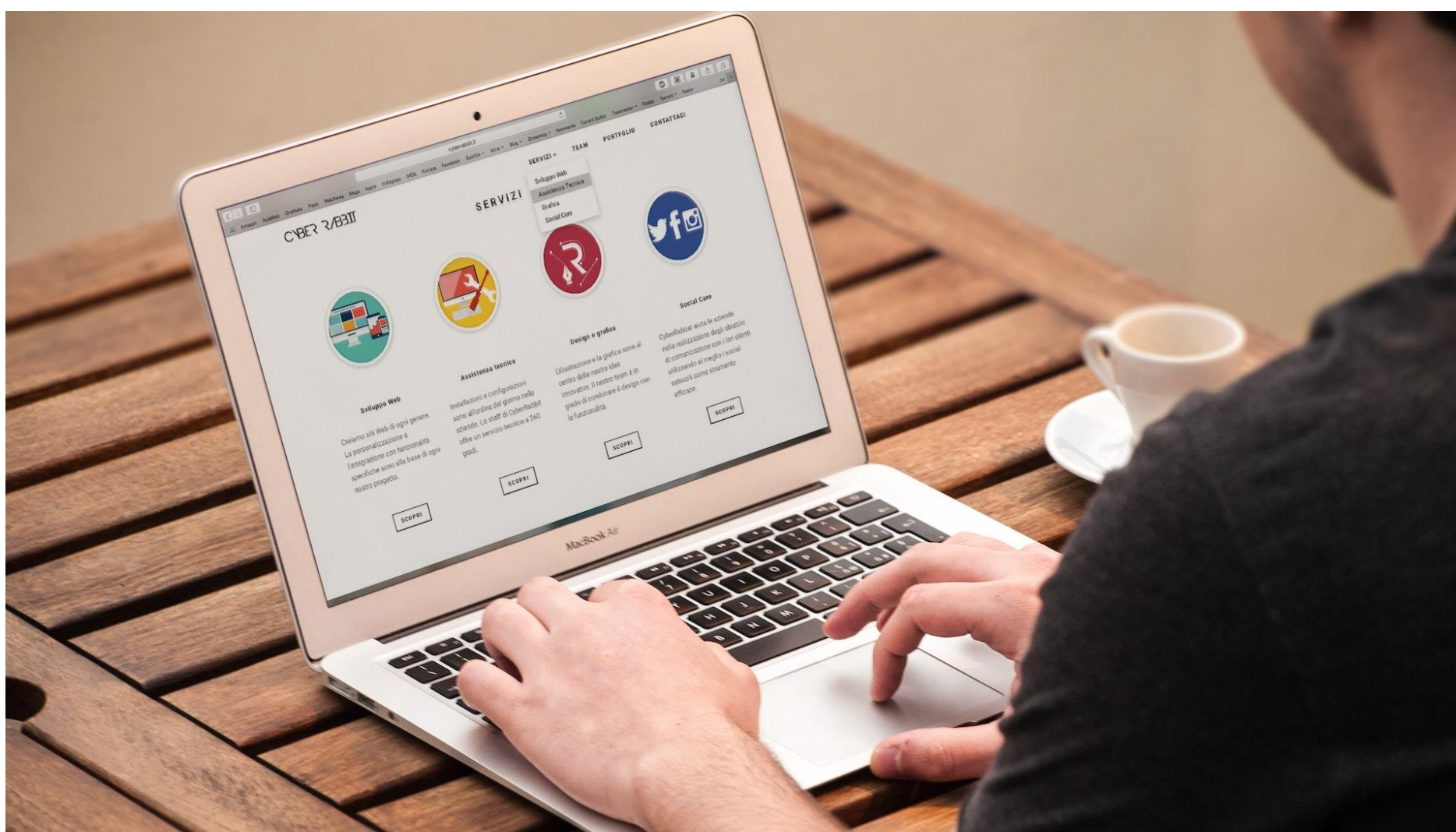
Across more than 15,000 skills requested by employers, basic computer literacy was #13 overall.

Preliminary findings; research forthcoming from NSC in January 2023.

But Nearly One-Third of US Workers Need Foundational Digital Skills

DIGITAL SKILLS

- 13% None
- 18% Limited
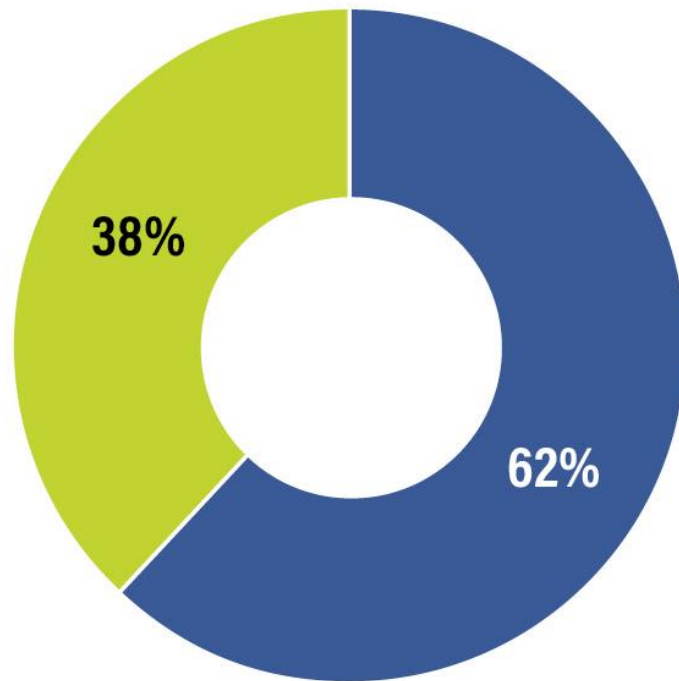- 35% Proficient
- 33% Advanced

Among workers ages 16-64.
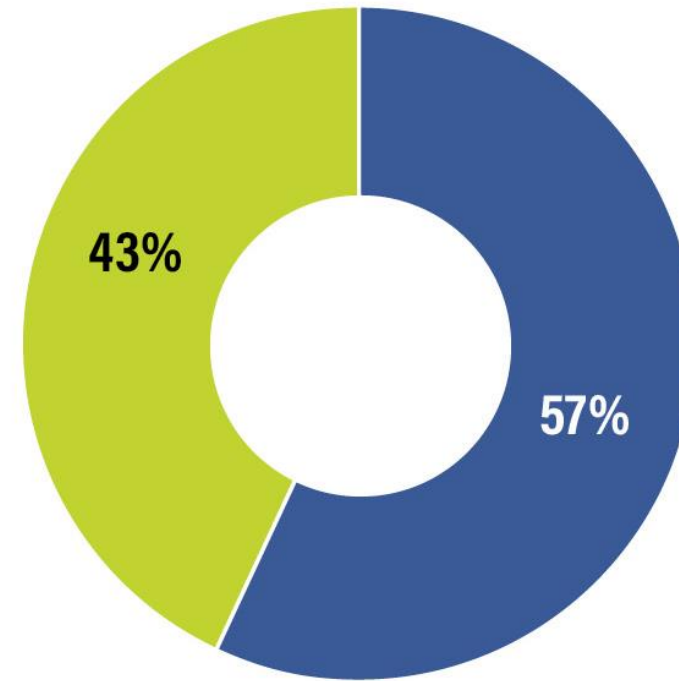*Source: OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), 2012-14.*

Many workers who lack digital literacy have jobs that require substantive computer skills

Among Workers with No Digital Skills

38%

62%

Among Workers with Limited Digital Skills

43%

57%

■ Moderate or complex computer skills needed for current job   ■ Straightforward computer skills needed for current job

What's going on?
Workers have *fragmented knowledge*

- *Definition*: Comfortable with certain tasks, unfamiliar with others

- Don't underestimate ingenuity and expertise.

- Avoid assumptions about who lacks digital skills and why

- Engage workers in identifying which interventions can help them make bridges between the skills they have and the skills they need

People prefer to learn digital skills in a real-world context.

What we know about building digital skills

- People are most motivated to build skills when they see a clear connection to their personal aspirations

- Good digital skill-building opportunities help participants practice in real-world contexts

- More than any individual software program, foundational digital skills instruction should focus on building *digital resilience* and a *sense of self-efficacy*

Definition of digital resilience: https://digitalus.org/our-work/

Teaching digital skills requires expertise

- Some *adult education* and *workforce development* programs are now incorporating digital skills…

- …and some *digital inclusion* programs are now expanding to include a workforce development focus

States and localities should invest in professional development to ensure that instructors can provide high-quality programs

Humans are social learners.

Online learning platforms work best when paired with ancillary support.

Once armed with <u>foundational</u> skills, workers need opportunities for:

- ***Upskilling*** with industry-specific digital skills necessary to maintain employment as their current jobs transform

And/or

- ***Reskilling*** with industry-specific digital skills needed to move into a new occupation or industry

What works to help build occupational digital skills?

BOOSTING DIGITAL LITERACY IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW RAPID PROTOTYPING IS HELPING BUSINESSES TO UPSKILL WORKERS AND WHAT POLICYMAKERS CAN DO TO HELP

Cognizant U.S. Foundation   NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
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More details in the full report: www.tinyurl.com/BoostingDL

- ▶ **Partnerships** between educational institutions and employers

- ▶ **Contextualized** and integrated learning

- ▶ **Rapid prototyping** of new programs

Gathering info from employers & workers can ensure programs target locally needed skills.

State Labor Market Information (LMI) agencies can also be valuable sources of data.

The Digital Equity Act opens up new opportunities to help workers build digital skills.

Structural racism affects every aspect of digital skills inequities.

Structural factors that hinder digital skill-building for workers of color can include:

- Unavailability or unaffordability of broadband access

- Lack of access to updated devices

- Limited K-12 education

- Low income or limited wealth

- Irregular or unstable employment

Because public policies helped *create* these inequities, policies must also be part of the *solution*.

WIOA system partners can use data to understand equity gaps and implement policies to remedy them.

Additional data on labor-market demand for digital skills is...

We analyzed 43 million job ads from 2021

Nearly half (**47 percent**) of all job postings require applicants to have at least one digital skill, and **91 percent** require at least one digital or potentially digital skill.

These findings hold broadly true even for:
➢ Job postings seeking workers with only a HS diploma or Associate Degree
➢ Job postings for workers with 0-2 or 3-5 years of experience
➢ Job postings from small businesses

Median hourly wages *for jobs requiring digital skills are notably higher than for non-digital jobs.*

Preliminary findings; exact results subject to adjustment. Research forthcoming in January 2023.

Time for your questions!

Stay in touch

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The New Landscape of Digital Literacy

How workers' uneven digital skills affect economic mobility and business competitiveness, and what policymakers can do about it.

Full charts and graphs in this data report:
tinyurl.com/NewLandsDL

Additional NSC digital skills resources

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Full report:
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➢ ***Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Digital Literacy*** *(fact sheet)*

➢ Digital skills fact sheets by industry:
   ➢ **Manufacturing**
   ➢ **Retail & hospitality**
   ➢ **Health & social work**
   ➢ **Construction, transportation & storage**

Other digital skills resources

The US Department of Education is currently funding the ***Digital Resilience in the American Workforce (DRAW)*** research project, which has produced several great resources:

➢ This blog post, with an **excellent synopsis of the various Digital Skills frameworks**.

➢ Another blog post **for educators** and other direct-service practitioners. It provides links to the incredibly useful **Digital Skills Library** of 2,000 free resources for learning digital skills

➢ A lengthy **landscape scan** for the project, covering a huge range of important findings related to digital skills and resilience.