Digital Equity Toolkit
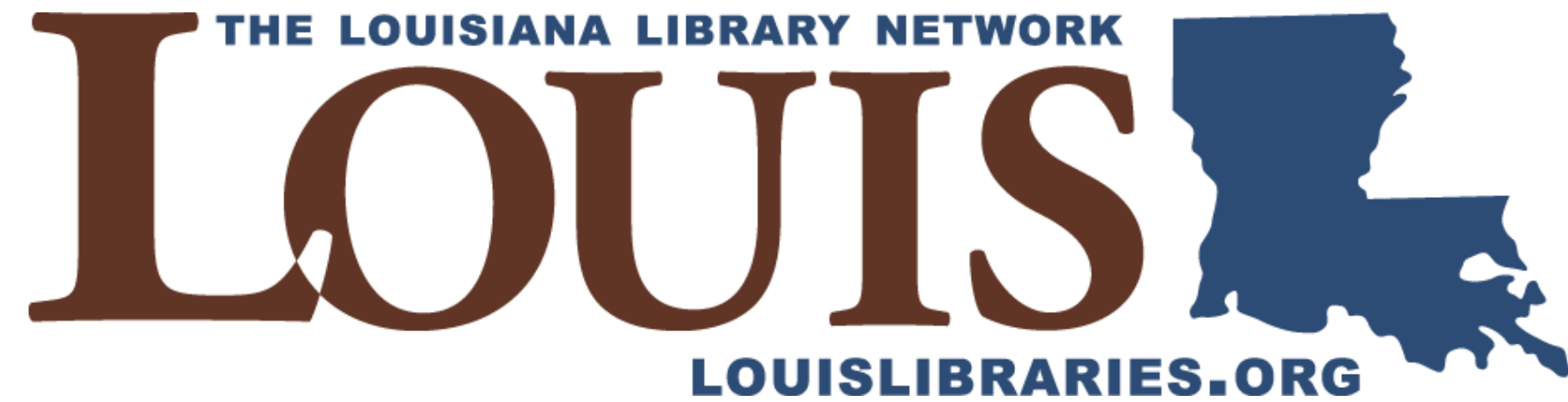
A Higher Education Framework for Closing the Digital Divide

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Louisiana Board of Regents

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THE LOUISIANA LIBRARY NETWORK

LOUIS

LOUISLIBRARIES.ORG

LOUIS is a consortium of public and private college and university libraries in the state of Louisiana. This partnership was formed in 1992 by the library deans and directors at these institutions, in order to create a cost-effective collaboration among the institutions for the procurement of library technology and resources. Our community provides cost-effective information resources, services and technology that support the teaching, learning, and research missions of our members' institutions. We are currently 47 members strong.

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The Digital Divide: An Overview

The Digital Divide

The digital divide is the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology constantly evolves, **the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life** (NDIA).

of Louisianians...

38% are not using a PC or tablet computer

17% are not using the internet

27% Lack an internet subscription

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Digital Equity

Digital equity is equity and cannot stand outside the broader work of ensuring that everyone has opportunities based on their needs.

Digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy, and economy. Digital equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. (NDIA)

VISIONS OF DIGITAL EQUITY

Published by the Benton Institute for Broadband & Society

August 2023

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Digital Inclusion

Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This includes five elements:

1. Affordable, [robust broadband internet service](#);
2. Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user;
3. Access to digital literacy training;
4. Quality technical support; and
5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.
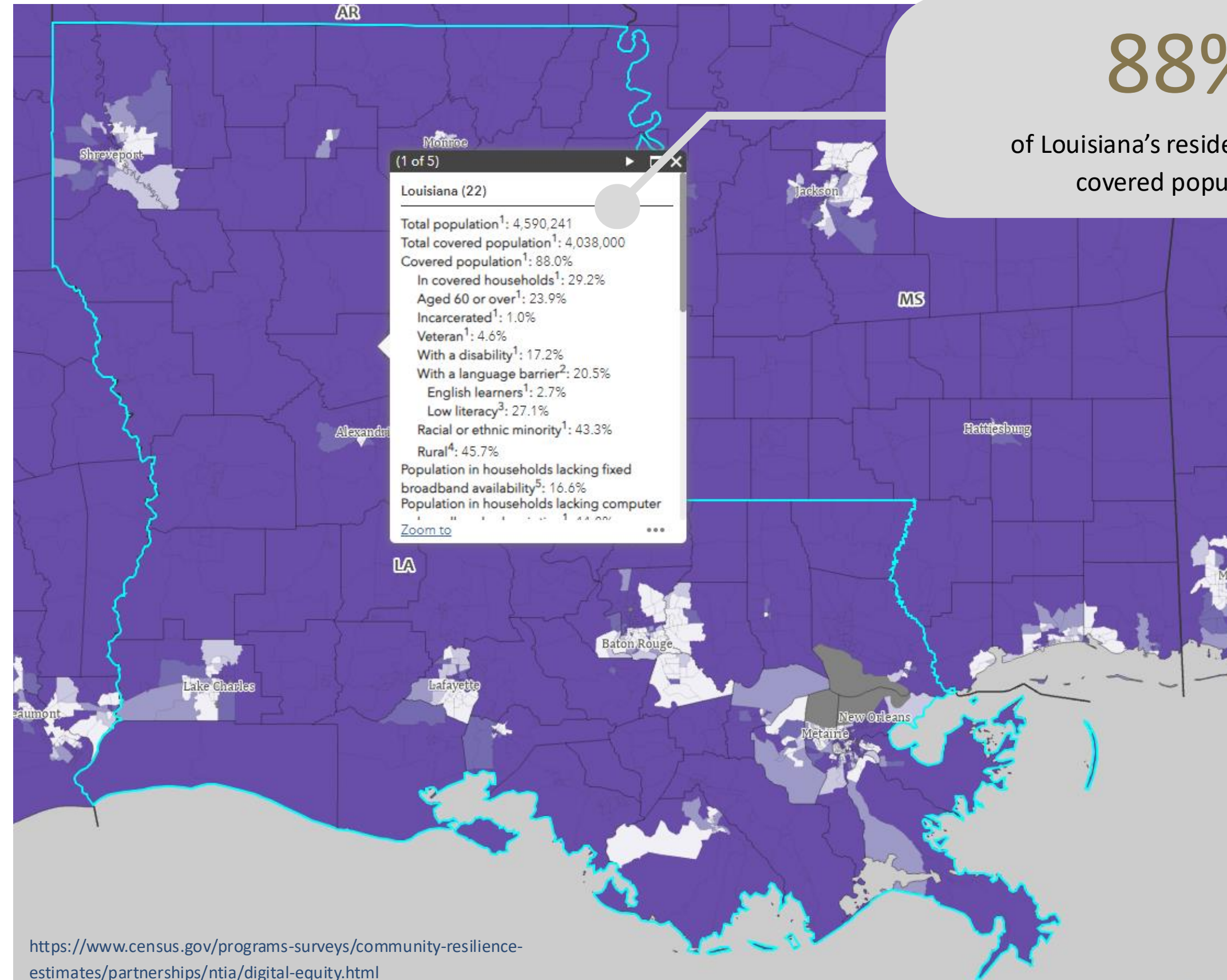
(NDIA)

Who is affected?

88%

of Louisiana's residents are in a covered population

(1 of 5)

Louisiana (22)

Total population[1]: 4,590,241
Total covered population[1]: 4,038,000
Covered population[1]: 88.0%
  In covered households[1]: 29.2%
  Aged 60 or over[1]: 23.9%
  Incarcerated[1]: 1.0%
  Veteran[1]: 4.6%
  With a disability[1]: 17.2%
  With a language barrier[2]: 20.5%
    English learners[1]: 2.7%
    Low literacy[3]: 27.1%
  Racial or ethnic minority[1]: 43.3%
  Rural[4]: 45.7%
Population in households lacking fixed
broadband availability[5]: 16.6%
Population in households lacking computer
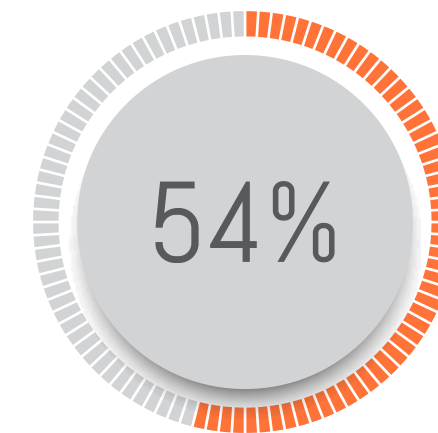
Zoom to

U.S. Census Bureau

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Access to Robust and Affordable Internet

Indeed, approximately one in five community college students who left school during the pandemic reported not having reliable access to high-speed internet.

Just over half (54 percent) of poll respondents and 72 percent of student caregivers said internet costs placed a somewhat or very significant burden on them.

54%

https://www.ihep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/IHEP_Broadband_brief_rd3_web-1.pdf

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Access to Appropriate Devices

13 percent of Black students primarily use a tablet or cell phone to complete their coursework, compared to just 8 percent of all college students

Over 50 percent of student caregivers and over 30 percent of Latinx students reported some-times, frequently, or always sharing a device used to complete coursework compared to only 21 percent of White students

Online Isn't Optional: Student Polling on Access to Internet and Devices Alyse Gray Parker, Janiel Santos, and Kimberly Dancy, May 2021

20% of respondents had difficulty maintaining access to technology.

These hardships were associated with lower grade-point averages, the research found, **and were disproportionately experienced by students of color and lower-income students.**

Technology Problems and Student Achievement Gaps: A Validation and Extension of the Technology Maintenance Construct

The Myth of the Digital Native

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Opportunity to Build Digital Skills

ACROSS INDUSTRIES, 92% OF JOBS REQUIRE DIGITAL SKILLS

"There's a huge spectrum. We say, 'Oh, well, they have a smartphone, they must have skills.' But that's really not the reality of how skills are acquired. We would not say that, because a 16-year-old had had a couple of driving lessons, they would be capable of driving in a NASCAR race."

NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

Opportunity to Build Digital Skills

"A lot of faculty struggle themselves to handle the technology burden. We do have professional development for our own uses and to be capable of using it in our teaching, but not necessarily to a level of expertise where we could teach it ourselves."

In fact, **only six percent of faculty** and eight percent of academic and administrative officials surveyed by The Chronicle believed their institution's instructors **were "very well" prepared to teach digital skills.**

The Myth of the Digital Native

RESEARCH BRIEF

The Myth of the Digital Native

How colleges are dealing with student digital-literacy gaps

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Digital Accessibility

How usable a website, app or other digital experience is by all possible users, regardless of their ability or disability.

A survey of college students, found that 34% of respondents with a documented disability had enrolled in an online degree program; and 71.6% of all respondents (both with and without disabilities) had taken online courses.

People with disabilities are less likely to earn a post-secondary degree and less likely to be employed than people without disabilities.

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Digital Privacy and Internet Safety

Over two-thirds of the students did not identify the news story as satirical, and 95 percent did not realize that a public-relations firm had set up the website.

We make the inappropriate assumption that because kids can manipulate technology for their own free-time purposes, they also have the sophistication to make choices about what information to believe.

Educating for Misunderstanding: How Approaches to Teaching Digital Literacy Make Students Susceptible to Scammers, Rogues, Bad Actors, and Hate Mongers

The Myth of the Digital Native

Pandemic Response

We are applying a team approach (strategic, operational, and tactical) to resolve the current issues selected as critical missions:

1. ensure that all Louisiana higher education **faculty are provided appropriate and ongoing professional development** required to move from pre-pandemic to post-pandemic phases under the digital inclusion banner;
2. ensure all Louisiana postsecondary **students are prepared through digital literacy efforts** to be successful in online education; and
3. ensure all Louisiana **postsecondary students have tools, including affordable and sustainable broadband connections**, through which to access digital educational programs and participate in electronically delivered content and credentials.

Statewide Digital Inclusion Pilot

"We know erasing Louisiana's digital divide requires us to pair digital learning opportunities with improved connectivity and affordability. We are pleased to launch these pilot programs in local libraries supported by local digital navigators because we believe empowering communities is key to strengthening digital literacy."

Dr. Kim Hunter-Reed

Office of Broadband Development and Connectivity

The Digital Opportunity plan outlines Louisiana's first coordinated effort to assess the state's digital divide and expand digital opportunity in Louisiana. Lower average rates of access to broadband, devices and digital skills proficiency affect the covered populations in this report as compared to others.

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Digital Equity Act Grant Programs

Digital Equity Act Grant Programs

Three Programs

State Digital Equity
Planning Program

State Digital Equity
Capacity Grant Program

Digital Equity Competitive
Grant Program

State Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program

$1.44 billion program

- Awards to States and Territories
- Supports digital equity projects
- Implements State Digital Equity Plans
- First grants awarded in July
- States determine fund distribution

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Digital Equity Competitive Grant Program

$1.25 billion program

- Supports digital equity projects for covered populations
- Applications due September 23
- Awards between $5 - $12 million
- Minimum 10% match required
- Partnerships strongly encouraged

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Covered Populations

- Low-income households
- Aging individuals
- Incarcerated persons
- Persons with disabilities
- Racial or ethnic minority groups
- Individuals with language barriers
- Rural Residents
- Veterans

Higher Education's Strategic Position

- Utilize research capabilities and resources
- Collaborate with state agencies and community partners
- Engage with state broadband offices
- Review state Digital Equity Plans
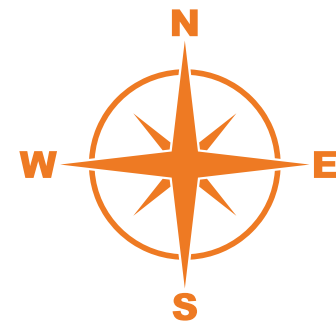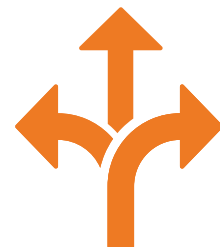- Leverage grants for digital equity programs

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Advancing Digital Opportunity: A Higher Education Toolkit

Guide for designing and scaling digital equity programs

Flexible framework

Prepare for grant proposals

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Toolkit Development

- Team of educators from AAC&U's Institute on Digital Equity
- Focus group with faculty, staff, and administrators
- Compilation of best practices, resources, and case studies

Toolkit Structure

Advancing Digital Opportunity: A Higher Education Toolkit

Home
Key Components of Digital Opportunity
The Digital Divide in Louisiana
How to Use this Toolkit
Stage 1: Research ▼
Stage 2: Develop Sustainable Programs ▼
Stage 3: Implementation ▼
Resources by Topic ▼

This comprehensive toolkit equips Louisiana's higher education institutions with a structured approach to bridging the digital divide, both on campus and in surrounding communities.

Stage 1: Research → Stage 2: Develop Sustainable Programs → Stage 3: Implementation → Resources by Topic

- Framework with stages to build digital equity foundation
- Strategies for students, faculty, staff, and community members

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Spotlight: Southern University

NTIA Connecting Minority Communities Grant Project

- Holistic and comprehensive
- Expanded broadband access
- Virtual learning model with Zoom and Canvas integration
- Digital skills training and device distribution
- Campus and community engagement

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Spotlight: LSU Eunice

Campus-wide digital literacy initiative

- Digital skills integrated into first-year courses
- Northstar assessments in four key skill areas
- Ensures all students develop a baseline of digital competency
- 2023-24 data:
  - Assessments taken = 2,085
  - Assessments passed = 959

Spotlight: Loyola University New Orleans

- **Service learning undergraduate course**
- **Multi-partner collaboration**
- **Students as digital navigators for non-profit**
- **Refurbished devices and computer lab**
- **Northstar Digital Literacy lesson plans**
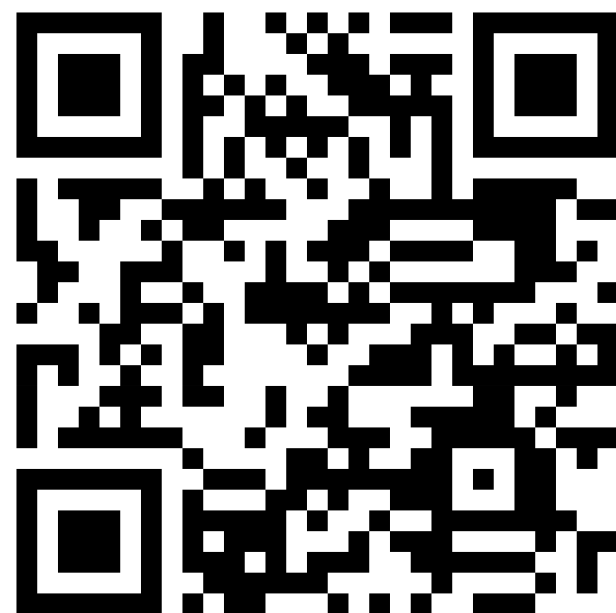- **Campus-wide digital equity team formed**

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Next Steps

Advancing Digital Opportunity: A Higher Education Toolkit

- Explore the toolkit
- Share
- Contribute resources
- Email: rebecca.kelley@laregents.edu

Learn about Grants

- Prepare for Digital Equity Act grant proposals
- Contact your state's broadband office

Questions?

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