

Digital access and readiness: public policy considerations



Solving the digital divide requires getting Americans access to the internet and making sure they have the required digital readiness skills. Digital readiness is the measure of whether an individual has the tools required to connect to the internet and the skills necessary to effectively use it. This includes the ability to access and search the internet; locate and evaluate information found online; create and share content; and fully participate in the connected digital world.

Vital services and sectors of the economy continue to move online, driven in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is crucial that all Americans have access to the internet and the basic digital readiness skills to fully participate in today's society.

Such skills are needed now to access critical economic, health, employment and educational resources. Training and mentorship in digital readiness must be part of the solution as governments seek to address the digital divide by promoting broadband deployment and adoption and by providing internet-enabled devices.

Ernst & Young LLP (EY US) supports government policies that fund digital readiness training and mentoring programs; develop digital readiness materials and best practices; address the specific needs of minority communities that have been left behind; and track the performance of programs so that resources can be effectively deployed and produce the intended results. EY US also stands ready to deploy our greatest resource – our people – to work in conjunction with policymakers, community organizations and the private sector to support initiatives that help all Americans access and harness the power of technology.

Digital access and readiness – principles

- 1 Readiness is an essential element of addressing the digital divide, one that has been overlooked in the past.** All Americans, regardless of age, location, race and gender, should have the opportunity to obtain basic digital access and develop the commensurate readiness skills to fully participate in today's society. From children accessing learning materials, to adults applying for jobs, to seniors managing their finances and seeking medical assistance, no American should be without the chance to access the internet and gain the skills needed to fully participate in today's online society.
- 2 Like other aspects of the digital divide, readiness gaps hit minority communities more acutely.** Data shows that the digital divide disproportionately impacts minority communities, and the unique needs of those communities must be addressed.
- 3 The federal government plays a key role in providing resources.** The federal government should be a resource on digital access and readiness for states, local governments and community organizations by providing a framework for deploying access solutions; supplying training materials and curricula; and identifying best practices for readiness training and mentoring.
- 4 One size does not fit all: the deployment of those resources must take place at the local level.** Community outreach programs are a necessary component of digital readiness efforts, as those without basic digital readiness skills may be unable to find or access needed assistance online. Digital readiness training and resources must be readily available to individuals, taking into account the unique circumstances of states, communities and cultures.
- 5 Proper governance is critical and must be built in to determine if digital access and readiness programs are succeeding.** Effectiveness needs to be continuously evaluated, and data should be leveraged to show impact, not just program progress.
- 6 The private sector can play a key part in providing digital readiness training and mentoring.** In partnership with federal, state and local governments, the private sector can play a crucial role by providing expertise and resources in the effort to bring all Americans the digital access and readiness skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century.

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