

# An Invitation to Create Alaska's Digital Future

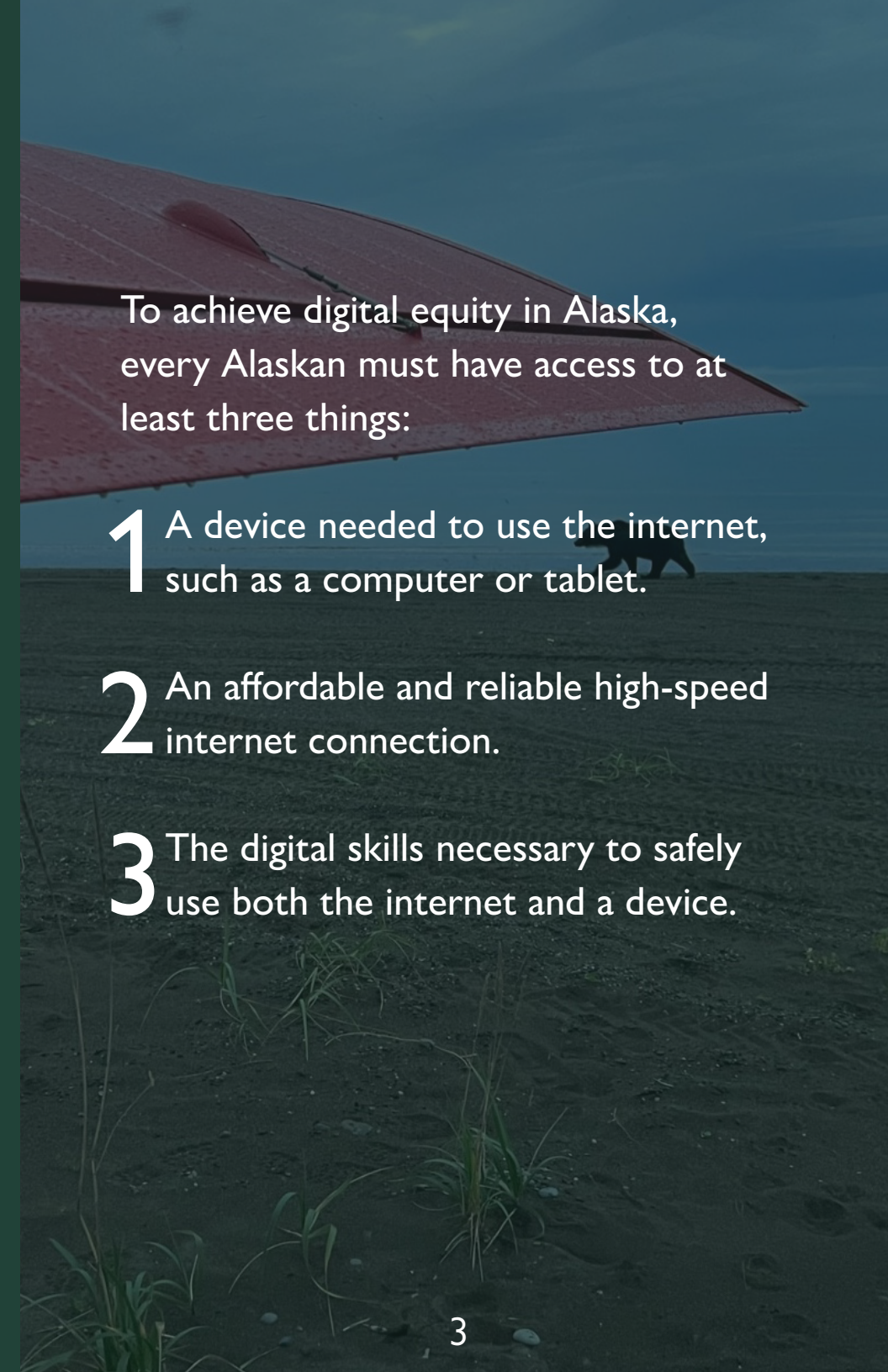
Connecting Alaskans: Developing a Digital Equity Plan for Alaska

## WHAT IS DIGITAL EQUITY?

“Digital equity” means that every Alaskan has access to the tools and knowledge necessary to use the internet, without barriers or obstacles getting in their way.

When the COVID-19 lockdown began in 2020, Alaskans quickly learned that internet access had become a necessity. It is necessary for engagement in society, democracy, and the economy. It is necessary for participation in the civic and cultural life of communities. It is necessary for work, education, and accessing needed services.





To achieve digital equity in Alaska, every Alaskan must have access to at least three things:

**1** A device needed to use the internet, such as a computer or tablet.

**2** An affordable and reliable high-speed internet connection.

**3** The digital skills necessary to safely use both the internet and a device.

## **DOES ALASKA HAVE DIGITAL EQUITY?**

Here is the bad news. Nearly 20 percent, or one in five Alaskans, don't use the internet, and 30 percent don't use a computer or a tablet.<sup>1</sup> More than 75 percent of Alaskans are not able to buy broadband, which provides the internet connection, at an affordable price. In fact, Alaska ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> of the 50 states for internet coverage, speed, and availability.<sup>2</sup>

This means that while some Alaskans can use the internet to access vital information, communicate for work and pleasure, and engage in the local and broader communities, many other Alaskans are left out.

<sup>1</sup>2021 NTIA Internet Use Survey (NTIA.gov)

<sup>2</sup>2023 Alaska Internet Coverage and Availability (BroadbandNow.com/Alaska)

So the simple answer is “no,”  
Alaska does not have digital equity.

But there is good news. With  
funding, the voices of Alaskans,  
and an understanding of digital  
equity barriers, Alaska can close  
the digital divide.



## FUNDING

Federal, State, Tribal, and local resources have been committed to address digital equity in Alaska.

The federal government has committed \$2.75 billion to digital equity, with \$567,000 committed directly to Alaska. Rasmuson Foundation will administer the \$567,000 grant and has committed \$3 million of its own funds to help develop a five-year Digital Equity Plan with the state.



The State of Alaska created an Office of Broadband that is focused on ensuring all Alaskans have affordable broadband access and the skills to fully utilize it.

Additional resources come from the Digital Equity Working Group that represents people and communities who lack digital equity. Members of this group will be reaching out to communities throughout Alaska in the spring of 2023.



## **THE VOICES OF ALASKANS**

More good news is that all Alaskans can have a voice in developing a digital equity plan. The Digital Equity Working Groups are holding listening sessions throughout the state.

Specifically, the project is seeking the voices of Alaskans who are in low-income households, over the age of 60, incarcerated, veterans, people with a disability, English language learners, members of racial or ethnic minorities, or residents outside of Anchorage or Fairbanks.





**82%** of Alaskans are  
a member of at  
least one or more of these groups.

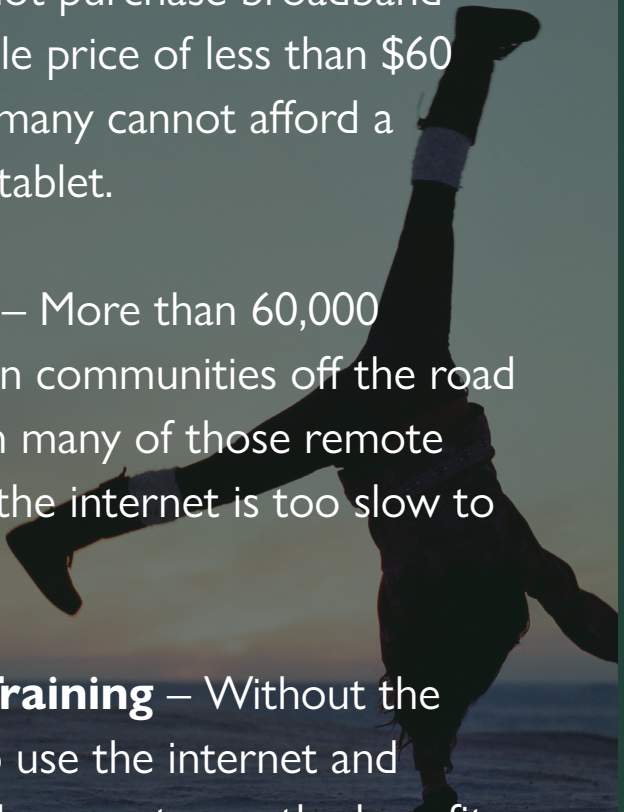
# UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO DIGITAL EQUITY

What is preventing digital equity in Alaska? Some of the barriers might be:

**1. Cost** – Seventy-five percent of Alaskans cannot purchase broadband at an affordable price of less than \$60 a month and many cannot afford a computer or tablet.

**2. Location** – More than 60,000 Alaskans live in communities off the road system, and in many of those remote communities the internet is too slow to be useful.

**3. Lack of Training** – Without the digital skills to use the internet and devices, people cannot reap the benefits of digital access.



But those are just a few of the things the Alaska Digital Equity Project Plan will address. There are likely many more barriers that are hidden. Through the listening sessions, the Digital Equity Working Group hopes to learn about the barriers to digital equity from Alaskans with first-hand experience. People in every corner of Alaska hold the key and the power to ensure that they, their children, and their grandchildren will have equitable access to digital technology.

## **TIME**

Even with funding and an understanding of experiences and barriers, digital equity in Alaska will take time. During 2023, the planning process will be underway. The steps to building a successful Digital Equity Plan include:

### ***Listening and Understanding***

- Outreach to covered populations
- Data collection and analysis
- Other planning efforts

### ***Reflecting on What We Have Learned***

- Developing strategies that address needs and gaps
- Consultation with a Digital Equity Working Group

### ***Seeking Feedback on the Plan***

- Draft Alaska's Digital Equity Plan
- Facilitate public comment

The digital equity gap in Alaska did not come about overnight, and it will not be eliminated overnight, the plan that will be finalized in 2023 will take years to implement.

Participation will assure that the five-year Digital Equity Plan addresses the real needs of Alaska residents and the barriers they face. Success, however, will require that Alaskans continue to participate in the years ahead as the plan is implemented.

## **WAYS TO BE INVOLVED**

### ***Help Organize a Community Event or Attend a Meeting***

You can host or attend a listening session to gather information from the members of your community. Your community could be any of the many covered populations who are in low-income households, over age 60, incarcerated, veterans, people with a disability, English language learners, members of racial or ethnic minorities, or residents outside of Anchorage or Fairbanks.

**Welcome to the conversation!**



Find us here:

 **Connect AK**

[broadbandforalaskans.org](http://broadbandforalaskans.org)

# Connect AK

## Digital Equity Working Group

