

CONNECTING SOUTHWEST OHIO

**SOUTHWEST OHIO'S DIGITAL
OPPORTUNITY PLAN**

**SOUTHWEST
OHIO DIGITAL
INCLUSION
ALLIANCE**



KEY TERMS

THE AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP)

offered \$14.2 billion to provide eligible households with a discount of up to \$30/month (\$75/month on qualifying tribal lands) for high-speed internet service and up to a \$100 discount toward a desktop, laptop or tablet computer offered by participating internet service providers.

THE BROADBAND EQUITY, ACCESS, AND

DEPLOYMENT (BEAD) Program provides \$42.45 billion to expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment and adoption programs across the country.

BROADBANDOHIO is a division of Ohio's Department of Development charged with expanding and enhancing broadband connectivity for families and businesses throughout Ohio.

THE CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND (CPF) provides \$10 billion in dedicated funding to states, territories, freely associated states, and tribal governments to fund critical capital projects – including high-speed internet infrastructure – that enable work, education and health monitoring in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

COVERED POPULATIONS include individuals age 60 and older; incarcerated individuals not in a federal correctional facility; veterans; individuals with disabilities; individuals with a language barrier, including those who are English learners and have low levels of literacy; members of racial or ethnic minority groups; individuals who primarily reside in a rural area; and individuals in households with incomes less than 150 percent of the federal poverty line.

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, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous peoples, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, people in rural areas and older adults.

Source: National Digital Inclusion Alliance.

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.

Source: National Digital Inclusion Alliance

THE DIGITAL EQUITY ACT provides \$2.75 billion to establish three grant programs that promote digital equity and inclusion. They aim to ensure that all people and communities have the skills, technology and capacity needed to reap the full benefits of our digital economy. The funding includes \$60 million to states and territories for planning grants, \$1.4 billion to states and territories for capacity grants and \$1.2 billion in competitive grants.

DIGITAL INCLUSION refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, access and use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This includes five elements: affordable, robust broadband internet service; internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; access to digital literacy training; quality technical support; and applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Source: National Digital Inclusion Alliance

DIGITAL NAVIGATORS are trusted guides who assist community members in internet adoption and the use of computing devices. Digital navigation services include ongoing assistance with affordable internet access, device acquisition, technical skills and application support.

Source: National Digital Inclusion Alliance

AN INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER (ISP) provides services for accessing, using, managing or participating on the internet. ISPs can be organized in various forms, such as commercial, community-owned, nonprofit or otherwise privately owned.

THE NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION (NTIA), located within the Department of Commerce, focuses largely on expanding broadband internet access and adoption in America, expanding the use of spectrum by all users, and ensuring that the internet remains an engine for continued innovation and economic growth.

High-speed internet is a necessity in today's world. We use it for school, work, health care, worship and communicating with friends and families. However, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity, and it disproportionately affects people in rural areas, older adults, people of color, households with low incomes, people with disabilities and veterans.

Communities are leveraging federal, state, local and private investment to bring high-speed internet service to every corner of our region.

To address issues beyond connectivity, Southwest Ohio stakeholders convened during 2023 with a common goal: build digital equity and opportunity in our communities. This plan is the result of that work.

BACKGROUND

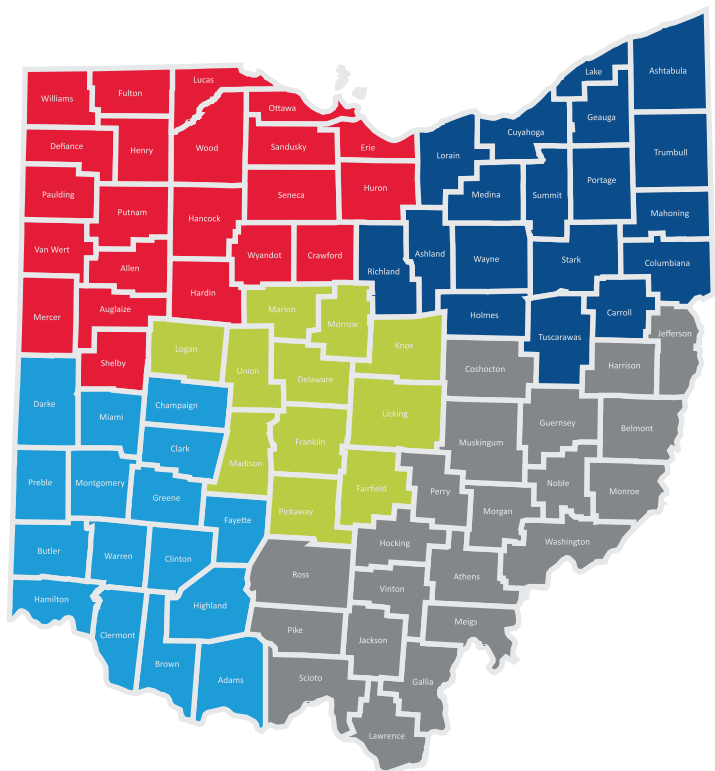
The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides \$65 billion to connect everyone in America to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet. These funds add to and support existing programs that expand internet access and use, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Department of the Treasury, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are leading efforts at the federal level.

Through the federally funded State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program, BroadbandOhio has developed a statewide Digital Opportunity Plan to achieve digital equity goals and close the digital divide.

In February 2023, Broadband Ohio established five Regional Digital Inclusion Alliances (RDIA) to champion digital equity and inclusion. Each RDIA is led by a backbone organization that centers its work around the needs of covered populations that often experience the greatest barriers to digital inclusion.

Ohio Regional Digital Inclusion Alliances

- Northwest – Toledo Lucas County Public Library
- Northeast – Cleveland Foundation
- Central – Smart Columbus!
- Southeast – Buckeye Hills Regional Council
- Southwest – United Way of Greater Cincinnati



PLANNING PROCESS

United Way of Greater Cincinnati partnered with the University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center to gather input, build momentum and identify digital inclusion stakeholders from across the 16-county Southwest Ohio region. Our planning process included online and in-person stakeholder meetings, asset mapping, pop-up listening sessions, stakeholder interviews, document and data review, and design workshops.

COMMUNITY POP-UPS

We met the community where it was by holding 10 community pop-ups at health fairs, community celebrations, libraries and similar gathering places and events. During the data collection period, we considered input from planning team members to help identify core organizations and existing events to maximize opportunities to connect with focus populations throughout our 16-county region. At each pop-up event, participants were invited to rate their levels of access to each element of digital inclusion (using sticker dots) and to share their reasoning for each rating. Participants were also invited to identify barriers to digital inclusion that most impact their community. We also asked them to suggest potential solutions to overcome those barriers.



HOW WE GOT HERE



DIGITAL DIVIDE DATA

DIGITAL DIVIDE INDEX

The Digital Divide Index (DDI) consists of two scores: the infrastructure/adoption (INFA) score and the socioeconomic (SE) score.

The INFA score consists of five variables related to broadband infrastructure and adoption. These include the percentage of the 2021 population not using the internet; the percentage of homes lacking a digital device; the percentage of homes with no internet access; download speeds; and upload speeds.

The SE score consists of five variables related to technology adoption. These include the percentage of the population age 65 years or older; the percentage of the population age 25 years or older with less than a high school education; the individual poverty rate; the percentage of the noninstitutionalized population with a disability; and an internet income ratio measure.

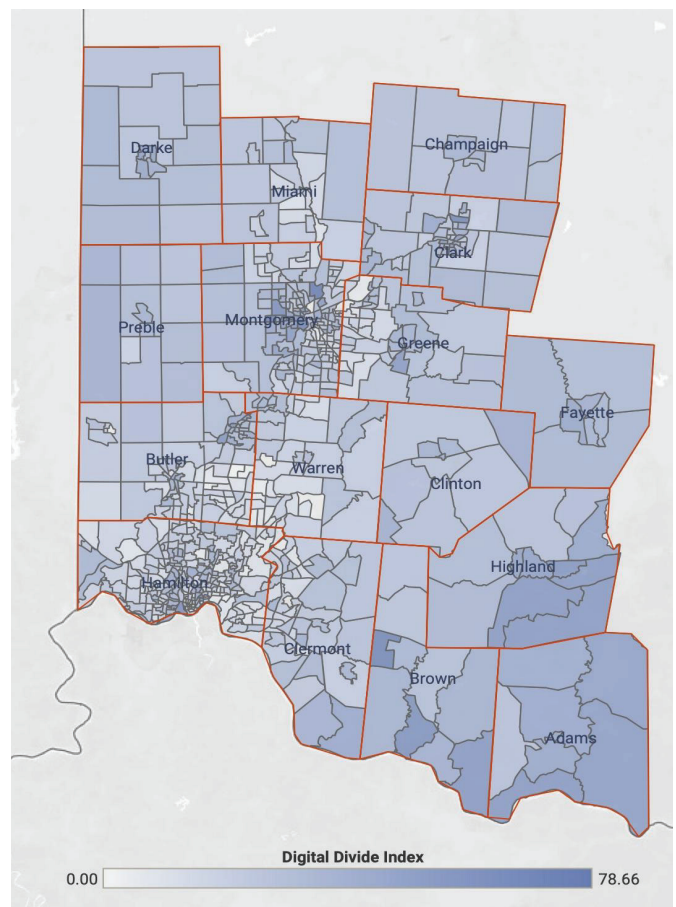
The higher the Digital Divide Index score, the greater the digital divide. If a particular geography has a greater INFA score than an SE score, digital inclusion efforts should focus on improving infrastructure. If the SE score is higher than the INFA score, then efforts should focus on improving digital literacy.

Source: Gallardo, R. (2023). *Digital Divide Index*. Purdue Center for Regional Development. Retrieved from Digital Divide Index (DDI): <http://pcrd.purdue.edu/ddi>

Southwest Ohio Digital Divide Index

County	Socioeconomic Score	Infrastructure/Adoption Score	SE - INFA	Digital Divide Index
Adams	61.54	57.95	3.58	69.09
Brown	48.21	51.97	-3.75	57.29
Butler	27.07	7.29	19.78	17.76
Champaign	31.05	34.09	-3.04	36.08
Clark	60.08	31.39	28.69	52.48
Clermont	32.42	2.40	30.02	18.18
Clinton	31.83	34.18	-2.35	36.61
Darke	37.94	44.92	-6.98	46.75
Fayette	51.26	39.13	12.13	51.58
Greene	28.50	16.99	11.52	24.39
Hamilton	28.62	0.00	28.62	14.41
Highland	49.19	53.82	-4.64	58.99
Miami	27.47	8.31	19.17	18.61
Montgomery	42.11	15.23	26.88	31.78
Preble	34.94	37.91	-2.96	40.75
Warren	7.14	4.11	3.03	3.52

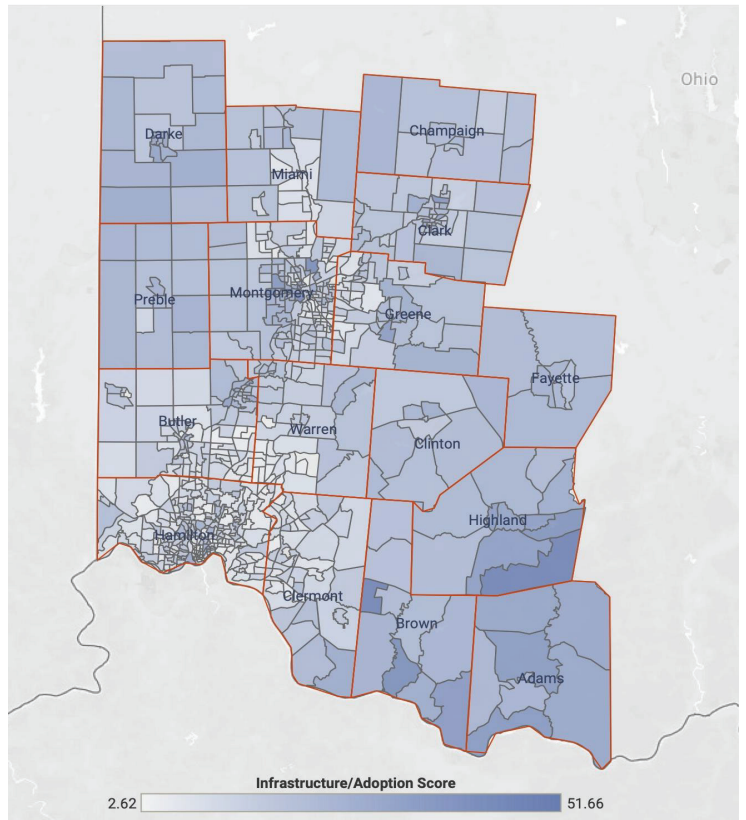
Source: Gallardo, R. (2023). *Digital Divide Index*. Purdue Center for Regional Development. Retrieved from Digital Divide Index (DDI): <http://pcrd.purdue.edu/ddi>



Infrastructure/ Adoption Score

County	INFA
Adams	57.95
Brown	51.97
Butler	7.29
Champaign	34.09
Clark	31.39
Clermont	2.40
Clinton	34.18
Darke	44.92
Fayette	39.13
Greene	16.99
Hamilton	0.00
Highland	53.82
Miami	8.31
Montgomery	15.23
Preble	37.91
Warren	4.11

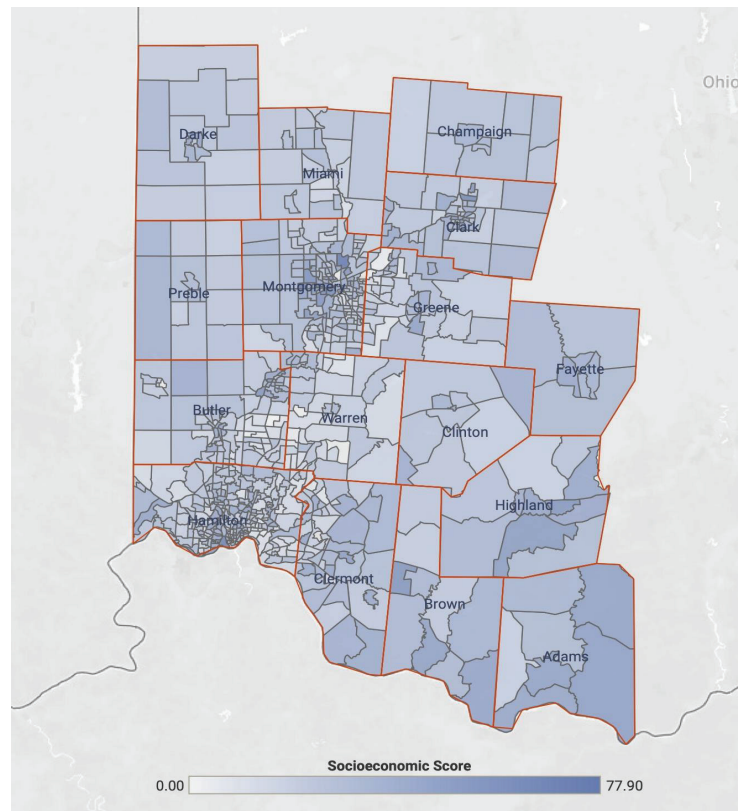
Source: Gallardo, R. (2023). Digital Divide Index. *Purdue Center for Regional Development*. Retrieved from Digital Divide Index (DDI): <http://pcrd.purdue.edu/ddi>



Socioeconomic Score

County	SE
Adams	61.54
Brown	48.21
Butler	27.07
Champaign	31.05
Clark	60.08
Clermont	32.42
Clinton	31.83
Darke	37.94
Fayette	51.26
Greene	28.50
Hamilton	28.62
Highland	49.19
Miami	27.47
Montgomery	42.11
Preble	34.94
Warren	7.14

Source: Gallardo, R. (2023). Digital Divide Index. *Purdue Center for Regional Development*. Retrieved from Digital Divide Index (DDI): <http://pcrd.purdue.edu/ddi>



DIGITAL DIVIDE DATA

AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

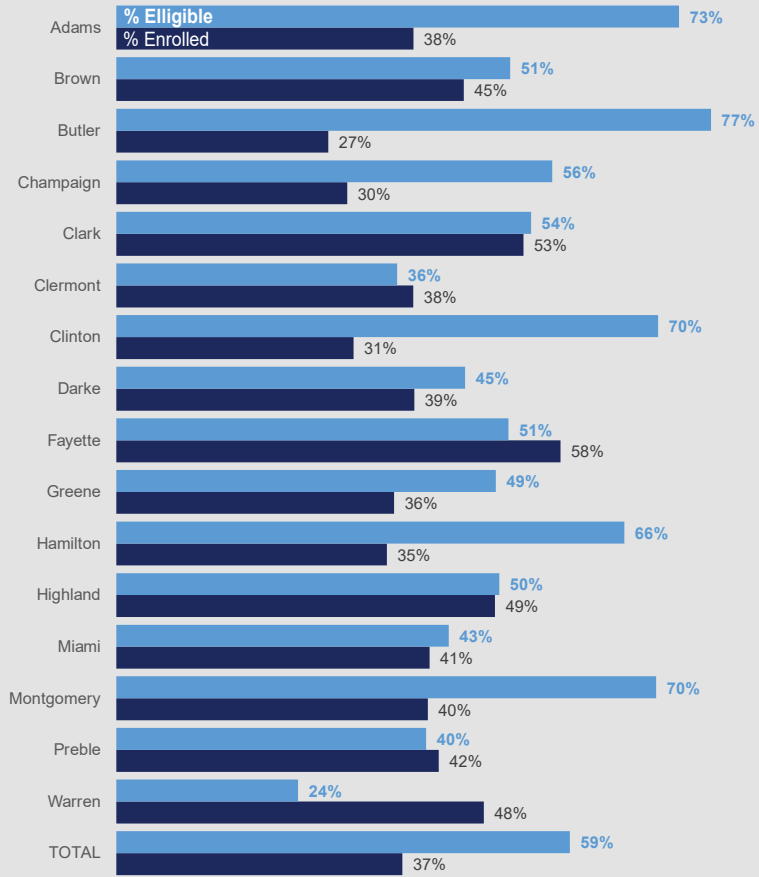
The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is a Federal Communications Commission program that provided \$14.2 billion to support households in paying the monthly costs of home broadband internet service.

Eligible households received up to \$30 per month to pay for internet costs (up to \$75 per month for qualified tribal lands) and a one-time stipend up to \$100 to buy an internet-enabled device.

Households qualified for the ACP by meeting any one of the following criteria:

- Fell under 200% of the annual federal poverty level.
- Received a Pell Grant in the previous academic year.
- Participated in a federal assistance program (e.g., SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, School Lunch Program).

ACP Enrollment in Southwest Ohio, by County



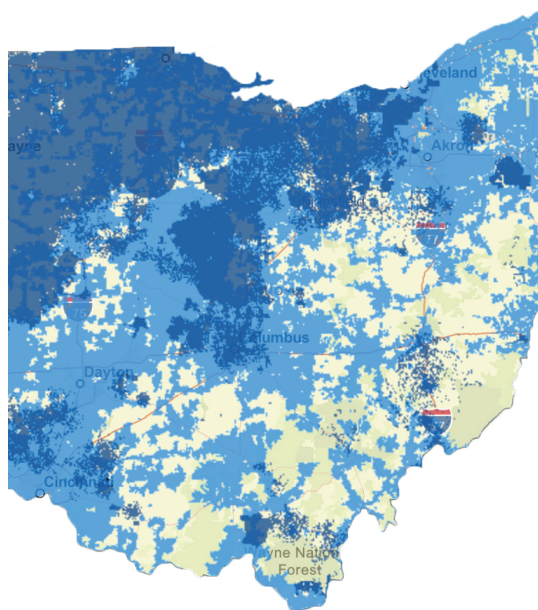
Source: Broadband Ohio

NOTE: As of March 15, 2024, Congress has not extended ACP funding beyond its initial appropriation. As a result, the Federal Communications Commission is winding down the program. ACP applications and enrollments ended on February 7, 2024, and its last fully funded month is April 2024. After ACP funding runs out, participating households will no longer receive ACP discounts.

OHIO BROADBAND AVAILABILITY

- Detailed Service Areas - 25 Mbps Download / 3Mbps Upload
- FCC Service Areas - 25 Mbps Download / 3Mbps Upload

Source: Broadband Ohio



FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AVAILABILITY

Access to high-speed, reliable internet is not available throughout Southwest Ohio, and both rural and urban communities are deeply impacted.

Access to home internet varies widely based on the community, neighborhood, street and even building where a person lives.

We consistently heard from people in rural communities that access to internet service was an issue, particularly in Clark, Clermont, Clinton, Darke and Miami counties. Many participants said they had only one option for home broadband service, and they felt this was not meeting their needs. Older adults in rural areas were particularly concerned about connecting to services and supports when they could not get online at home.

We also heard from attendees at a community celebration in a predominantly Black and Latino area of Montgomery County that they, too, faced a lack of internet service options.

Solutions

Existing Solutions

- Community-based organizations support ISP enrollment, access and adoption.
- Free public Wi-Fi in housing communities, business districts, libraries, etc.

Quick Wins

- Build collaborative infrastructure to advocate for broadband expansion.
- Prioritize unserved and underserved communities with new public Wi-Fi.
- Ensure new infrastructure meets or exceeds federal/state standards.
- Increase use of and trust in public Wi-Fi.
- Educate consumers about differences in internet speeds.

Long-Term Strategies

- Improve broadband map to reflect precise availability.
- Leverage public funding to connect rural communities.
- Build “last mile” infrastructure.

AFFORDABILITY

The cost of home broadband internet service is expensive, particularly for households with low or fixed incomes.

People told us they could not afford another bill, and they reported that prices go up without corresponding service improvements. We also heard from rural residents that the cost of internet is expensive due to limited ISP options, and it is compounded by expensive infrastructure costs for areas without access.

Solutions

Existing Solutions

- Affordable Connectivity Plan.
- ISP-provided plans including AT&T Assist and Spectrum Internet Assist.
- Public Wi-Fi.
- Frequently switching providers to utilize new customer discounts.

Quick Wins

- Advocate for continued ACP funding.
- Increase participation in low-cost ISP-provided plans.
- Increase public Wi-Fi access points.
- Identify additional resources for schools and libraries to provide connectivity devices and services.

Long-Term Strategies

- Identify permanent funding for low/no-cost internet for households with low incomes.
- Incentivize ISP competition, particularly in rural areas.
- Advocate for consistent nationwide pricing.

DEVICES

Limited finances prevent some people from obtaining digital devices, and many people use a smartphone as their primary internet access point.

Solutions

Existing Solutions

- Device distribution paired with skills training.
- Computers available at community centers, libraries, schools.
- Devices distributed through workforce development programs.
- Lower-cost refurbished device distribution.

Quick Wins

- Engage digital navigators to provide 1:1 assistance.
- Connect device distribution with software suites such as Microsoft Office, Google Workspace, etc.
- Support device refurbishment.

Long-Term Strategies

- Develop centralized hubs for low-cost device distribution and digital navigation services.

DIGITAL SKILLS

Having limited digital skills impacts the quality of life and overall engagement within the Southwest Ohio region.

The lack of digital skills limited participants' ability to navigate social services, apply for jobs and connect with others. However, there is no one-size-fits-all response; supports should be tailored to the specific needs of a community or population.

Solutions

Existing Solutions

- At least 31 organizations provide some kind of digital skills.

Quick Wins

- Develop a digital navigation model beginning with community influencers and then transitioning to peer educators.
- Foster common practices and definitions.
- Encourage "digital skills refresh" activities.
- Create materials in multiple languages for non-English speakers.
- Promote existing resources and solutions.

Long-Term Strategies

- Begin digital skills training in early childhood.
- Promote the value of digital skills.
- Bring digital skills support to people via bookmobiles, etc.
- Use existing community centers and trusted community-based organizations to teach digital skills.
- Enhance 211's digital navigation services.
- Ensure digital skills training is accessible in participants' first language.
- Create a digital skills incubator or accelerator program.

PRIVACY AND SECURITY

Many communities expressed concern over digital safety and the ability to protect their private data. We heard concerns about digital safety and avoiding scams, and people did not feel adequately equipped to prevent or address the various threats posed online.

We also heard that there is fear of and resistance to digital technology, particularly among those with limited digital skills.

Solutions

Existing Solutions

- Free online security software.
- At least 14 Southwest Ohio organizations provide digital privacy and security resources and education.

Quick Wins

- Evaluate existing digital safety training for availability and efficacy.
- Identify places where digital safety resources already exist or could be impactful.
- Teach community members to do periodic “digital refreshes” on their devices.
- Use peer education/train-the-trainer models for digital security and privacy.
- Promote the availability of and use of online security software.

Long-Term Strategies

- Increase digital access.
- Build processes and systems to protect the public’s interests.
- Incorporate digital security and privacy into workplace wellness plans.
- Increase overall digital skills.

DIGITAL INCLUSION ORGANIZATIONS BY PILLARS & FOCUS POPULATIONS

Organization Name	Digital Inclusion Components			
	Broadband Access & Affordability	Public Device & Internet Access	Device Access	Digital Skills & Technical Support
altafiber	x			x
AT&T	x			x
Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Community Support Center		x	x	x
Blue Sky Wireless	x			
Bradford Public Library		x	x	x
Brown County Public Library	x	x		x
CareSource	x		x	x
Center for Employment Opportunities	x	x	x	x
Champaign County Library	x	x	x	x
Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library		x	x	x
Cincinnati Parent Empowerment Network	x		x	
Cincinnati Works				x
Clermont County Public Library	x	x		x
Clinton County Port Authority	x			x
Community Matters		x		
Connect Holding II LLC d/b/a Brightspeed	x			
Dayton Metro Library		x	x	x
Easterseals Redwood			x	x
Ebenezer Healthcare Access		x	x	x
Exciting Technology	x	x		
Future Plans	x			x
Greater Cincinnati Microenterprise Initiative				x
Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association				
Interact for Health				
Learn to Earn Dayton	x	x	x	x
Lebanon Public Library		x		x
Madisonville Mission Ministries			x	
Meals on Wheels Southwest OH & Northern KY	x	x	x	x
Mechanicsburg Public Library		x	x	x
Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission				
MidPointe Library System	x	x	x	x
Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners			x	x
Montgomery County Educational Service Center	x		x	x
National Church Residences	x		x	x
New Madison Public Library		x	x	
Ohio Connectivity Champions	x	x	x	x
Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities	x	x	x	x
Option Plus Social Service Pantry		x	x	x
Pleasant Square Community Center		x		x
Preble County Development Partnership	x			
Pro Seniors Inc.				x
Salem Township Public Library	x	x	x	
Salvation Army (Cincinnati)	x	x		
Sinclair Community College		x		x
St. Mary Development	x		x	x
Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE)OCHE)				x
Talbert House			x	x
United Way of Greater Cincinnati	x			x
University of Cincinnati				x
Uptown Consortium Inc.				x
Vantage Workforce Solutions	x		x	x
Verizon Wireless	x		x	
Village of Richfield	x			
Warren County Board of Commissioners	x			
Warren County Children Services		x	x	
Washington-Centerville Public Library		x		x
West Clermont School District	x		x	
Wilberforce University	x	x	x	x
Williams Frances Theatre LLC Event House	x	x	x	x
Wright Memorial Public Library	x	x	x	x
YMCA Of Greater Cincinnati			x	x
YWCA Dayton			x	x
TOTAL ORGANIZATIONS	33	29	34	44

CONNECTING SOUTHWEST OHIO REGIONAL DIGITAL INCLUSION ALLIANCE (RDIA)

The Connecting Southwest Ohio RDIA brings together organizations from the 16-county Southwest Ohio region to create solutions and support organizations addressing digital gaps in our communities, including affordability, accessibility and digital skills.

RESEARCH TEAM

United Way of Greater Cincinnati

Kristina Scott, *Public Policy and Advocacy Director*

Nina Neto, *Public Policy and Advocacy Associate*

About United Way of Greater Cincinnati

United Way of Greater Cincinnati unites our community by taking action, advocating and investing to accelerate positive change in Greater Cincinnati. We work to move our region forward in areas critical to our community's success, including quality education, financial empowerment and housing security. We cannot do this work alone. We are leading a movement to address the root causes of issues, rebuild systems and create solutions so everyone in our community has access to opportunity.

University of Cincinnati Evaluation Service Center

Carissa Bradley Schutzman, *Director*

Sonya Michele Turner, *Associate Director*

Ann Marie Castleman, *Research Associate*

Sara T. Stacy, *Research Associate*

About the University of Cincinnati Evaluation Service Center

UCESC has functioned as an independent service center at the University of Cincinnati since 1996. UCESC provides research, evaluation, assessment and consulting services to equip clients and partners to make data-based decisions for accountability, continuous quality improvement, program planning, and program and policy development. UCESC employs a collaborative model, starting with the pre-proposal phase, and has provided comprehensive external evaluation and research services to UC units, schools and school districts, higher education, professional development providers, child care and early childhood education providers, and health-related and social service organizations.

PARTICIPANTS

Thank you to the groups that made this work possible:

AARP
Adams County Economic & Community Development
Department
Adams County Public Library
altafiber
AT&T
Avondale Community Council
Avondale Development Corporation
Bellbrook-Sugarcreek Community Support Center
Blue Sky Wireless
Bradford Public Library
Brightspeed
BroadbandOhio
Brown County Public Library
Butler County Board of Developmental Disabilities

Butler County United Way
CareSource
Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio
Center for Employment Opportunities
Central State University
Champaign County Library
Charter Communications
Child Focus
Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library
Cincinnati Art Museum
Cincinnati Parent Empowerment Network
Cincinnati Works
City of Cincinnati
City of Dayton
City of Middletown
Clark County Public Library

Clark State College
Clermont County Public Library
Clinton County Port Authority
Community Matters
Countryside YMCA
Darke County United Way
Dayton Metro Library
Dayton Photonics
Dayton Young Black Professionals
Downtown Eaton Inc.
DSD Advisors LLC
Easterseals Redwood
Ebenezer Healthcare Access
Exciting Technology LLC
Felicity Branch Library
Flywheel Social Enterprise Hub
Food Equity Coalition
Future Plans
GMI Companies
GPD Creative Agency
Greater Cincinnati Foundation
Greater Cincinnati Microenterprise Initiative
Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association
Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners
Hamilton County Developmental Disabilities Services
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
I Love West Dayton
Interact for Health
Jewish Family Service of Cincinnati
Junior Achievement of OKI Partners
Learn to Earn Dayton
Lebanon Public Library
Madisonville Mission Ministries
Management Council of the Ohio Education Computer
Network
Meals on Wheels Southwest OH & Northern KY
Mechanicsburg Public Library
Miami Valley Community Action Partnership
Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
MidPointe Library System
Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners
Montgomery County Educational Service Center
Montgomery County Job & Family Services
Montgomery County Office of Reentry
National Church Residences
National League of Cities
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
New Madison Public Library
Ohio Connectivity Champions

Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities
Ohio Means Jobs
Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments
Option Plus Social Service Pantry
Peace Baptist Church
Per Scholas
Pleasant Square Community Center
Preble County Development Partnership
Pro Seniors
Promise to Bless Promotion
Relink.org
Salem Township Public Library
Salvation Army (Cincinnati)
Sinclair College
Southwest Ohio Computer Association
Springfield Foundation
St. Mary Development Corporation
Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education
Strategies to End Homelessness Inc.
Technology First
Technology Tailor Made
The Dayton Foundation
Twin Valley Community Schools
United Way of Clark, Champaign & Madison Counties
United Way of Clinton County
United Way of Greater Cincinnati
United Way of the Greater Dayton Area
University of Cincinnati
UpSpring
Uptown Consortium Inc.
Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio
Vantage Workforce Solutions
Verizon Wireless
Village of Richfield
Warren County Board of Commissioners
Warren County Children's Services
Warren County Community Services
Washington-Centerville Public Library
West Clermont School District
Wilberforce University
Williams Frances Theatre LLC Event House
Wilmington Public Library
Wright Memorial Public Library
YMCA Of Greater Cincinnati
YWCA Dayton

And the residents of Adams, Brown, Butler, Champaign,
Clark, Clermont, Clinton, Darke, Fayette, Greene, Hamilton,
Highland, Miami, Montgomery, Preble and Warren counties.



UNITED WAY
Greater Cincinnati