

# Capital Area Partnership Uplifting People, Inc. Regional Digital Opportunity Plan

## 1 Executive Summary

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**Purpose:** The Regional Digital Opportunity Plan for the areas served by Capital Area Partnership Uplifting People, Inc. aims to address the pressing need for comprehensive digital infrastructure development and digital literacy initiatives in the City of Richmond, Virginia and its surrounding counties. As technology continues to reshape our lives, bridging the digital divide and fostering equitable access to digital resources have become imperative for the economic, educational, and social well-being of our community.

### Key Points:

#### 1. Bridging the Digital Divide:

- The plan acknowledges the existing digital divide, which disproportionately affects marginalized communities within the region.
- By investing in broadband infrastructure expansion and affordability initiatives, we seek to ensure equitable access to high-speed internet for all residents and businesses.

#### 2. Economic Growth and Innovation:

- Recognizing the pivotal role of digital connectivity in economic development, the plan encourages private sector partnerships to boost innovation and entrepreneurship.
- By fostering a supportive environment for tech startups and businesses, the region can attract new investments and create job opportunities.

#### 3. Education and Lifelong Learning:

- Education is a cornerstone of this plan, with a focus on providing students and educators with the necessary tools and connectivity for remote learning and digital skills development.
- Lifelong learning initiatives will also be promoted to empower residents with digital literacy skills for the evolving job market.

#### 4. Digital Inclusion and Literacy:

- Recognizing that access alone is insufficient, the plan emphasizes the importance of digital literacy programs to empower residents of all ages.
- Community centers and libraries will play a crucial role in providing digital literacy training.

## **5. Stakeholder Collaboration:**

- The success of this plan relies on collaboration among government entities, private sector partners, educational institutions, and community organizations.
- Regular communication and coordination will be essential to achieving our digital transformation goals.

In conclusion, this Regional Digital Opportunity Plan is a visionary roadmap to create a digitally inclusive and prosperous region. By addressing the digital divide, fostering innovation, and prioritizing education and public services, this plan seeks to empower our community and position it for a brighter, more connected future. Through collective effort and collaboration, we can ensure that all residents have the opportunity to thrive in the digital age.

## 2 Introduction and Vision for Digital Opportunity

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**Introduction:** The City of Richmond is at a pivotal juncture in its story. Our region, steeped in tradition and history, is also a thriving hub of commerce, education, and culture. However, as we step further into the digital age, it is imperative that we recognize the profound impact that technology and connectivity have on every aspect of our lives.

**Vision Statement:** *Empowering Our Community Through Digital Opportunity*

In envisioning the future, we commit to a vision where digital opportunity is not a luxury but a fundamental right. We envision a region where every resident, regardless of their background or circumstance, has equal access to the digital tools, resources, and knowledge needed to thrive in the 21st century.

**Context:** Our region boasts a rich history, a diverse population, and a vibrant economy. However, disparities in digital access and skills threaten to hinder our progress. Large segments of our community lack reliable internet access, limiting their educational and economic opportunities. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgency of addressing these issues, as remote work and virtual learning have become essential.

**Why This Definition of Digital Opportunity:** We have adopted this comprehensive definition of digital opportunity because it reflects our commitment to addressing the complex challenges faced by our region. We recognize that success in the digital age is not solely defined by access to broadband internet but also by digital literacy, innovation, and inclusion.

**What Success Looks Like:** Success, in the context of our Regional Digital Opportunity Plan, means:

1. **Universal Access:** Every resident and business in our region has affordable, high-speed internet access, eliminating the digital divide.
2. **Education Excellence:** Our schools and educational institutions are equipped with the latest technology, and our students have the digital skills needed for success.
3. **Economic Prosperity:** We are a hub for tech innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting investments and creating jobs.

4. **Digital Inclusion:** We prioritize equity, ensuring that marginalized communities have access to digital resources and skills.

**Regional Priorities:** Our priorities include:

1. **Broadband Infrastructure:** Expanding broadband infrastructure to underserved areas.
2. **Education and Digital Literacy:** Promoting digital literacy programs and ensuring access to technology in schools.
3. **Economic Development:** Fostering an innovation-friendly environment to attract tech businesses and startups.
4. **Digital Inclusion:** Establishing community centers and libraries as digital literacy hubs.

This Regional Digital Opportunity Plan is not just a roadmap; it's a commitment to a future where our region thrives in the digital age. By working together, we will ensure that no one is left behind, and everyone can participate in and benefit from the digital opportunities of our time.

### 3 Current State of Digital Opportunity: Barriers and Assets

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In our pursuit of digital opportunity for all, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges and barriers faced by our region and its Covered Populations. Equally vital is recognizing the unique assets and resources available within the region to promote digital inclusion.

#### **Barriers to Digital Opportunity:**

1. **Affordability:** A significant barrier is the cost of broadband internet services. Many residents, particularly in low-income communities, struggle to afford high-speed connectivity.
2. **Device Accessibility:** A lack of access to affordable devices, such as computers and tablets, hinders digital participation for those without personal hardware.
3. **Digital Skills Gap:** A substantial portion of the population lacks digital literacy skills needed for employment, education, and civic engagement in an increasingly digital society.
4. **Technical Support:** The absence of readily available technical support and assistance makes it challenging for individuals to troubleshoot and navigate digital platforms effectively.
5. **Digital Navigation:** Navigating the complex digital landscape can be daunting for some, leading to underutilization of online resources and services.

#### **Regional Assets Promoting Digital Opportunity:**

1. **Broadband Expansion Initiatives:** Publicly funded broadband expansion projects are underway, aiming to improve connectivity in underserved areas.
2. **Public Libraries:** Public library systems provide free access to computers and digital literacy programs, promoting digital inclusion.
3. **Nonprofit Organizations:** Numerous local nonprofits offer digital skills training, digital navigation assistance, and affordable device programs for disadvantaged populations.
4. **Education Institutions:** Local universities and colleges collaborate with K-12 schools to promote digital literacy and STEM education, bridging the digital skills gap.

5. **Local Government Initiatives:** The City of Richmond and surrounding counties have launched digital equity initiatives, including Wi-Fi hotspot distribution and community technology centers.
6. **Corporate Partnerships:** Private sector partnerships have supported digital literacy initiatives, providing resources and expertise to advance digital inclusion.
7. **Community Centers:** These hubs often offer computer access, training, and digital resources to underserved communities.
8. **Existing Digital Opportunity Planning:** Our region has existing digital opportunity research and planning efforts underway that outline strategies to address barriers and promote inclusion.
9. **Telecommunications Providers:** Private telecommunications companies are collaborating on affordable internet access programs for low-income households.
10. **Economic Development Agencies:** Regional economic development organizations work to attract tech companies and startups, creating job opportunities and advancing digital innovation.
11. **Civic Engagement Initiatives:** Community organizations facilitate civic engagement through digital platforms, ensuring all voices are heard.

This inventory of assets and barriers underscores the multifaceted nature of digital opportunity in our region. As we move forward, it is imperative to leverage these assets effectively, address the barriers comprehensively, and collaborate across public and private sectors to ensure that every resident can participate fully in our digital society.

## 4 Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

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### **Overview of Survey Distribution Efforts (Requirement 1):**

In our efforts to distribute the digital opportunity survey across the region, we prioritized broad outreach and engaged with local and regional organizations to ensure extensive coverage. The goal was to gather valuable insights from *Covered Populations* while promoting inclusivity and representation.

**Collaborating Organizations:** We collaborated with a diverse range of organizations, including but not limited to:

1. **Local Government Agencies:** Partnered with city and county government offices to reach residents through official channels and public services.
2. **Nonprofit and Community-Based Organizations:** Worked closely with local nonprofits dedicated to digital inclusion, such as Virginia Community Action Partnership and Senior Connections, which have extensive outreach networks.
3. **Faith-Based Organizations:** Leveraged partnerships with churches and religious organizations to reach diverse communities.

**Extent of Distribution:** Our distribution efforts were comprehensive, aiming for maximum coverage across the region. We employed various channels, including email campaigns, physical distribution at public facilities, and community events. Additionally, our partner organizations actively promoted the survey within their respective networks.

**Engagement Level:** The response to the survey was encouraging, with a diverse cross-section of the community participating. We observed active engagement among covered populations, including residents from urban and rural areas, individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and representatives of various age groups. The collaboration with trusted local organizations helped build trust and encouraged participation among underserved and marginalized communities.

### **Overview of Community Input Sessions (Requirement 2):**

In addition to the survey, we coordinated and hosted community input sessions to engage directly with our clientele and representatives of local and regional organizations. These sessions provided a platform for in-depth discussions and qualitative insights into digital opportunity challenges and solutions.

**Participants:** Invited to these sessions were representatives from covered populations, community leaders, educators, and nonprofit organizations.

**Topics:** The goal of each session was to cover a wide range of topics, including barriers to digital opportunity, experiences with digital access and skills, and suggestions for improvement.

**Feedback:** The feedback from these sessions was helpful in shaping the priorities and strategies outlined in our Digital Opportunity Plan.

### **Implementation of Strategy for Collaboration and Consultation:**

Our strategy for collaboration and consultation involved multiple steps:

1. **Outreach:** We proactively reached out to our partner organizations and stakeholders, explaining the importance of their involvement in shaping the Digital Opportunity Plan.
2. **Engagement Opportunities:** We offered various engagement opportunities, including digital surveys, physical/printed surveys, and community input sessions to accommodate different preferences and levels of involvement.

By actively involving a diverse range of stakeholders and providing multiple avenues for engagement, we ensured that the Digital Opportunity Plan reflects the needs and aspirations of our community while fostering ongoing collaboration for its successful implementation.



## 5 Implementation

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### Implementation Strategy for the Digital Opportunity Plan

#### Requirement 1: Holistic Approach and Measurable Goals

**Barriers Addressed:** Our implementation strategy is designed to comprehensively address the barriers to digital opportunity, including affordability, device access, digital skills, technical support, and digital navigation.

#### Measurable Goals and Objectives:

##### Goal 1: Bridging the Affordability Gap

- Objective 1: Ensure affordable broadband access for 95% of underserved households within 3 years.
- Objective 2: Implement a subsidy program to reduce internet costs for low-income families, reaching 10,000 households annually.

##### Goal 2: Ensuring Device Access

- Objective 1: Distribute a minimum of 1,000 affordable or refurbished devices to underserved individuals and families annually.
- Objective 2: Establish device lending programs in libraries and community centers, reaching 10,000 users annually.

##### Goal 3: Enhancing Digital Skills

- Objective 1: Provide digital literacy training to 5,000 individuals annually, with a focus on seniors and underserved communities.
- Objective 2: Establish a digital skills certification program in partnership with local schools and colleges.

##### Goal 4: Technical Support and Digital Navigation

- Objective 1: Establish a helpline and online support platform for digital assistance, serving 10,000 users annually.
- Objective 2: Train 250 community volunteers as digital navigators to assist residents in accessing online resources.

#### Sustainability and Evaluation:

To ensure the plan's sustainability and effectiveness, we will:

- **Establish a Digital Inclusion Team:** Create a dedicated team within CAPUP to oversee and coordinate digital inclusion efforts, ensuring continued focus and coordination.
- **Leverage Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborate with private sector partners to share the responsibility of funding and maintaining digital inclusion programs.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage community members in the planning and evaluation process to ensure their needs are continually addressed.

- **Regular Assessments:** Conduct biannual assessments to measure progress against objectives and adjust strategies as needed.

### **Requirement 2: Addressing Gaps in Existing Efforts**

Our strategy addresses gaps in existing efforts by:

- Expanding device distribution and access programs to reach more underserved individuals.
- Enhancing the scale and reach of digital skills training programs, with a particular focus on senior citizens and marginalized communities.
- Establishing a comprehensive technical support system and digital navigator network to bridge the support gap.
- Developing subsidy programs to make broadband services more affordable for low-income households.

### **Requirement 3: Engagement with Workforce Agencies, Labor Organizations, and Institutions of Higher Learning**

#### **a. Workforce Agencies:**

- Partner with regional workforce agencies to integrate digital skills training into job training and placement programs.
- Collaborate with workforce boards to identify employment opportunities in the digital sector and prepare underserved populations for these roles.

#### **b. Labor Organizations and Community-Based Organizations:**

- Engage with labor organizations to advocate for digital skills development as a means of enhancing employability.
- Collaborate with community-based organizations to expand the reach of digital literacy programs in underserved neighborhoods.

#### **c. Institutions of Higher Learning:**

- Work closely with local colleges and universities to develop digital skills certification programs.
- Establish partnerships with community colleges to provide affordable access to digital training.
- Leverage educational service agencies to extend digital literacy efforts to K-12 students and parents.

### **Requirement 4: Timeline for Implementation**

Our timeline for implementation spans a 5-year period, with ongoing evaluation and updates:

- Year 1-2: Focus on infrastructure development, device distribution, and initial digital literacy programs.

- Year 3-4: Expand programs, enhance technical support, and establish subsidy programs.
- Year 5: Evaluate progress, adjust strategies as needed, and set the course for ongoing digital inclusion efforts.

### **Requirement 5: Collaboration with Key Stakeholders**

We plan to actively collaborate with key stakeholders in the region, including:

- Local government agencies such as the City of Richmond and surrounding counties.
- Nonprofit organizations dedicated to digital inclusion.
- Educational institutions, including universities and K-12 schools.
- Public libraries and healthcare providers.
- Workforce agencies and labor organizations.
- Private sector partners interested in advancing digital inclusion.

Through this collaborative approach, we aim to ensure that our efforts are comprehensive, effective, and sustainable, addressing the diverse needs of our community and promoting digital equity for all residents.

## 6 Conclusion

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This Regional Digital Opportunity Plan, crafted by Capital Area Partnership Uplifting People, Inc. (CAPUP), is a testament to our unwavering commitment to creating a more equitable and digitally inclusive future for the Greater Richmond Region. In closing, let us reiterate the purpose and key points of this transformative plan, which is poised to have a profound impact on digital opportunity in our region.

**Purpose Reiterated:** Our purpose is clear and resolute – to bridge the digital divide and foster equitable access to digital resources for all residents in our community. We understand that digital opportunity is not just about technology; it is about empowering individuals and communities to participate fully in our society, democracy, and economy.

**Key Points Reinforced:**

1. **Equitable Access:** We are committed to ensuring that every resident has affordable, high-speed internet access, eradicating the digital divide that has held back underserved populations for far too long.
2. **Economic Prosperity:** By fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation in the digital sector, we will boost economic growth and provide new opportunities for our community members.
3. **Education and Lifelong Learning:** We recognize the pivotal role of education in digital inclusion. Our plan prioritizes digital literacy programs and provides students and educators with the tools they need for success.
4. **Digital Inclusion:** We are committed to empowering marginalized communities through digital literacy programs, ensuring that no one is left behind.

**Impact and Future:** As we embark on the execution of this plan, the impact will be far-reaching. We envision a future where every resident, regardless of their background or circumstances, will have the digital skills and resources to thrive in our increasingly digital world. This plan will empower individuals, strengthen our community, and position our region as a leader in the digital age.

In conclusion, this plan is a blueprint for a brighter, more connected, and digitally inclusive future. Through collaboration, we will transform our region into a place where digital

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opportunity is a reality for everyone, not just a privileged few. Together, we will build a stronger, more resilient, and digitally empowered community for generations to come.