

The ~~Future~~ Present is Digital*

A New Law Makes Access More Equitable

Judy Mortrude

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does the title mean? Why is the word “future” crossed out?
2. List some of the interactions and processes in your life that are now digital.
3. Study this vocabulary: *digital, equity, eligible*

To Fully Participate, You Need to Be Connected

The pandemic has changed everything. You can visit your doctor online. You can receive your pandemic relief payments online. Your classes and your children’s classes happen online. And you are probably using more and more technology at your job. The *present* is digital. We all need access to high speed internet, quality devices, and training in order to live, work, and learn in this connected world.

A new federal law – the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – will help people access low-cost but high-quality internet service. The law will also bring millions of dollars to states to build digital equity. Digital equity means that everyone in a community has the capacity to use information technology for “full participation in the society and economy of the United States.”



Photo from [Broadband-Social/Street Lab/CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

How do You Get Connected?

The new law creates the Affordable Connectivity Program. Once you register, the program can provide a discount of up to \$30 per month for internet service for *eligible* households (and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands.)

Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating



Digital Resilience...

...is having the awareness, skills, agility, and confidence to be empowered users of new technologies and adapt to changing digital skill demands. Digital resilience improves capacity to problem-solve and upskill, navigate digital transformations, and be active participants in society and the economy.

– [Digital US](#)

*This article is Level 12. You can find a Level 5 version on pp. 25-26.

AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM

WHAT IS IT?
The Affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC program that helps connect families and households struggling to afford internet service.

The benefit provides:

- Up to \$30/month discount for internet service;
- Up to \$75/month discount for households on qualifying Tribal lands; and
- A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet purchased through a participating provider.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?
A household is eligible if one member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Has an income that is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guide lines;
- Participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline;
- Participates in Tribal specific programs, such as Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal TANF, or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations;
- Is approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school break fast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; or
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating broadband provider's existing low-income program.

TWO STEPS TO ENROLL

1
Go to [ACPBenefit.org](https://www.fcc.gov/acp-consumer-outreach-toolkit) to submit an application or print out a mail-in application.

2
Contact your preferred participating provider to select an eligible plan and have the discount applied to your bill.

Some providers may have an alternative application that they will ask you to complete.

Eligible households must both apply for the program and contact a participating provider to select a service plan.

LEARN MORE

Call 877-384-2575, or
Visit [fcc.gov/acp](https://www.fcc.gov/acp)

FCC

Programa de Descuentos Para Internet (ACP)

¿QUÉ ES?
El Programa de Descuentos para Internet es un programa de la FCC que ofrece ayuda a los hogares con problemas para pagar sus servicios de Internet.

Este beneficio te proporciona:

- Máximo \$30 de descuento al mes para tu servicio de Internet;
- Máximo \$75 de descuento al mes para hogares elegibles en Territorios Tribales.
- Un descuento único de hasta \$100 por una computadora portátil, computadora de escritorio o una tableta electrónica a través de un proveedor participante.

¿QUIÉN ES ELEGIBLE?
Un hogar es elegible si uno de sus miembros cumple, por lo menos, con una de las siguientes condiciones:

- Tiene un ingreso igual o menor al 200% de las pautas federales de pobreza (federal poverty guidelines, en inglés);
- Participa en ciertos programas de asistencia, como SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC o Lifeline;
- Participa en programas dirigidos específicamente a territorios Tribales, como la oficina general de asistencia (Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance), Tribal TANF o el programa de distribución de alimentos en reservas (Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations);
- Está aprobado para recibir subsidios del programa de desayunos o almuerzos gratuitos o a precio reducido, incluso bajo la disposición de la USDA Community Eligibility Provision para los años escolares 2019-2020, 2020-2021 o 2021-2022;
- Recibió una beca Federal Pell Grant durante el año actual de premiación; o
- Cumple con las condiciones de elegibilidad para el programa de bajos ingresos de alguno de los proveedores participantes.

INSCRIPCIÓN EN DOS PASOS

1
Ingrese a [ACPBenefit.org](https://www.fcc.gov/acp-consumer-outreach-toolkit) para enviar una solicitud o imprimir un formulario para enviarlo por correo

2
Contáctese con su proveedor participante preferido para seleccionar un plan elegible y pedirle que el descuento se aplique a su cuenta.

Algunos proveedores podrían usar formularios de solicitud alternativos que le pedirán llenar.

Los hogares elegibles deben hacer dos cosas: presentar su solicitud al programa y contactarse con un proveedor participante para elegir un plan de servicios.

AVERIGÜE MÁS

Llame al 877-384-2575, or
Visite [fcc.gov/acp](https://www.fcc.gov/acp)

FCC

Flyers in English and Spanish (and in various formats) are available at <https://www.fcc.gov/acp-consumer-outreach-toolkit>.

providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price. The Affordable Connectivity Program is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household.

A household is *eligible* if at least one person meets at least one of these criteria:

- Has an income that is at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines;
- Participates in SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline;
- Participates in Tribal programs, such as BIA General Assistance or Tribal TANF;
- Receives free or reduced-price school lunch or breakfast this school year or in the past two school years;
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year; or

- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income program.

You can find out which internet providers in your area are providing this benefit and sign up at <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>.

How Can Your Program Help the State Build Digital Equity?

The new law also creates the Digital Equity State Plan process. In March 2022, each state will get money to create a plan to build digital equity across their state, and then each state will get more money to put that plan into action. A big focus of the work will be on certain community members, named in the law as “covered populations.” These priority groups include:

- People earning less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level
- Older people

- People in prison
- Veterans
- People with disabilities
- English language learners and people with literacy needs
- People in Black, Indigenous, People of Color communities
- People in rural communities

Anyone participating in adult education programs is a priority for digital equity work. It is critical that adult education state leaders get involved in the state digital equity planning, and that local programs make their needs known. Adult education programs might need funds for broadband access, devices for learners and staff, and for digital skill building and digital navigation services. During the planning process, people will have the opportunity to participate in “public comment.” This is a great opportunity for civic engagement—for getting involved and having your voice heard.

What do you need?

As you think about the tools and skills you need for accessing health care, communicating with your children’s school, and getting ahead on the job, what is missing? How would having affordable, high-quality internet and devices for your household matter? What would it mean not only to have digital equity but to be digitally resilient—ready for the future?

AFTER YOU READ:

1. If you were telling a friend about the Affordable Connectivity Program, what would you say? What are the key points you would want to communicate? Write a short script of what you would say and practice saying it.
2. As a class, discuss what adult learners need to gain digital equity. For example, does your program need access to broadband internet? Does

your program need more funding for digital literacy classes and devices for students? Write down your ideas and share them with your program director. (See box below for more information.)

3. What are some of the things in your life that are going digital—for example, keeping in touch with your child’s teacher, updating your timesheet at work, using GPS to find your way around? Which digital tools do you use with ease? Which ones do you need more practice with? How would digital equity help you be more digitally resilient?
4. Consider submitting your writing to *The Change Agent*. See our current Call for Articles [here](#) and in the next section of this magazine.

Judy Mortrude is a senior Technical Advisor at World Education, and she is the president of the National Coalition for Literacy.



Make Your Voice Heard!

States will start making a digital equity plan in the spring of 2022.

1. Ask your program director about the state level process for creating a plan to distribute funds from the Digital Equity Act. Or reach out to the director of adult education in your state. Ask how you can contribute comments verbally or in writing.
2. Compile your comments (alone or with your classmates). When the public comment period begins, share your comments.
3. Get published! Submit your writing to [The Change Agent!](#) See pp. 34-36 for more information.