



Colorado Center
on Law and Policy

A complex digital network background consisting of numerous blue and white lines connecting various nodes, creating a web-like structure. The background is dark, with some nodes glowing in green and red. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and technological.

DIGITAL EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND LITERACY IN COLORADO

Coloradans' Perspectives
on Digital Equity, Digital
Challenges, and
Recommendations to
Expand Digital Inclusion
and Literacy in Colorado

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About Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Colorado Center on Law and Policy is a non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to the vision that every Coloradan should have what they need to succeed. Standing with diverse communities, organizations, and individuals, we are but one piece of the rising movement to fight poverty across our state. We serve our fellow Coloradans using the powers of legal advocacy, legislative advocacy, coalition building, community engagement, and research and analysis.

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Disclaimer

The recommendations made in this report are based on CCLP’s research and analysis of what we heard during our listening sessions. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions or recommendations of partner organizations or state agencies.

Part 1: Introduction of Project

This report and its findings resulted from a partnership between the Skills2Compete coalition, and the Office of the Future of Work in Colorado’s Department of Labor and Employment. In many ways, it arose from an understanding by all partners of the importance of issues related to digital equity, inclusion, and literacy, and how those relate to the ability of low-income Coloradans to meet their basic needs. The urgency of this work only intensified in a world transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While we have since begun to recover from the pandemic, it has left its imprint on our state—and the growth in importance of digital tools, technologies, and platforms that accelerated during the pandemic shows no signs of slowing. This project is intended to provide findings and recommendations to the Office of the Future of Work to guide in the development and creation of the state’s first digital equity plan as part of the federal Digital Equity Act. This report serves as a summary of those findings and recommendations, which are highlighted in Part 2 of this report.

Background

This project began from ongoing conversations between staff at the Office of the Future of Work (OFOW) in Colorado’s Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE), the Skills2Compete Coalition (the Colorado branch of the National Skills Coalition) and the Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP), and additional departments at CCLP. At the end of 2019, the new Director of the Office of the Future of Work was invited to a Skills2Compete meeting to describe the potential scope of work the office would be addressing over the next couple of years and share internal priorities identified by CDLE with the members of the coalition. During the presentation, there was a realization that the state and coalition members had intersecting priorities that would benefit from a collaborative and coordinated effort to address the intersecting topics of digital equity, inclusion, and literacy. This initial confirmation of shared goals and priorities led to regular conversations beginning in February 2020 that focused on the development of a strategy for identifying the true perspectives and needs of Coloradans related to digital equity, inclusion, and literacy.

Digital equity, inclusion, and literacy relate to many aspects of the work pursued by the Skills2Compete coalition in Colorado. The coalition has met monthly for close to ten years and has a broad representation of organizations and agencies from across Colorado that includes policy groups, adult education and vocational training partners, community college team members, community-based organizations involved in creating and operating innovative skill-training programs, libraries, workforce center team members and directors, and other state and local agencies that are involved in the areas of training, adult education, workforce preparation and career planning, and public assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP) and SNAP Employment & Training (known as Employment First in Colorado but often referred to as SNAP E&T). Based on this diverse range of members and their perspectives on digital access and inclusion activities and challenges in different regions of Colorado, the staff of the OFOW and the Skills2Compete coalition agreed to work in partnership as a practical way of engaging with a wider network of providers, interested coalitions, and additional stakeholders, including impacted people and communities in numerous counties and communities across Colorado.

Initial outreach to staff members of different organizations, including members of the groups that were represented at the Skills2Compete coalition and their own networks, indicated that the issues of digital inclusion, equity and literacy were significant challenges for participants and clients served by these organizations, as well as creating challenges for the staff providing these services. Challenges were identified by a range of non-profit organizations and service providers, as well as state agencies (such as the SNAP office and workforce centers, libraries, community resource centers, recreation centers offering an array of resources for members and residents).

Lack of access to devices, limited reliable connectivity via the internet, and limited knowledge of where to find assistance with using devices and the internet were consistently named as issues throughout this initial outreach. Challenges associated with acquiring the basic skills needed to have greater access to a world that increasingly relies on the use of digital and online application portals and platforms were also lifted up through these initial conversations. Another finding that compounded the digital equity, inclusion, and literacy challenges noted above was the general assumption by many that all Coloradans can perform necessary functions through the range of digital technologies and platforms that are currently available. Groups also noted the new emphasis, and in many cases, reliance on using digital technology that has increased dramatically since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach and Methods

The project summarized in this report formally began in early 2022 as a partnership between CCLP and OFOW, with the assistance of the Skills2Compete coalition and the Support Services Committee of that coalition. The specific goals of the project were focused on performing outreach and listening sessions to a broad range of organizations, networks and stakeholders in order to identify the priorities of the counties and regions, to determine strategies for convening groups of individuals and family-members that were directly impacted by the lack of digital equity and necessary skills, and to dispel some of the assumptions that existed related to why some of challenges exist.

The focus of the outreach and engagement activities was to gather diverse perspectives, ideas and suggestions from people faced with navigating the complex world of digital technology and

literacy in its many forms, especially individuals and families representing the targeted populations listed on the following page. The content and recommendations of this report are based on what was heard in the listening sessions, conversations, and interviews with participants representing the targeted populations. Listening sessions were scheduled and convened in partnership with different community organizations that serve the target populations, though many also offer services to other individuals seeking assistance and support of all types.

This project did not focus on comparing what was said and heard during listening sessions with any existing data related to digital access, the availability of broadband internet, or the types of digital devices owned by Colorado households. That said, the findings of this project will be incorporated into a more comprehensive Digital Inclusion and Literacy Report prepared by CCLP, the Center for Work Education and Employment (CWEE), and the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning later in 2023. The follow-up report will also include more information on the feedback, findings, overall themes and general data obtained through diverse listening sessions and interviews as well as surveys performed by these partners across the state. This report gives a first-look at some of the findings we've gathered from this larger work thus far.

As a method for reaching organizations that were linked to individuals and families representing the target populations (see below) for the project, the staff at CCLP focused on collaborating with community partners that were active members of the Skills2Compete coalition, its Support Services Committee, and partner networks.

The populations prioritized for obtaining perspectives and input for this specific project included:

- Low-income people with limited digital access
- Older individuals needing skills and access
- Parents of K-12 students
- People with physical disabilities
- People with invisible disabilities (including cognitive, learning and behavioral/mental health)
- Individuals with limited education and work histories; low written, spoken literacy, numeracy
- Non-native English speakers
- Workers needing digital access and skills to obtain new work opportunities or change careers

- Staff that work with and support different populations with digital access, skills and problem-solving

Each listening session was arranged in partnership with different community partners, and the partners would then invite interested participants and staff in their programs to attend. Some of the listening sessions were performed in person and others were done remotely. Community partners that convened listening sessions included:

- **Community Works:** one program in Denver; one in Pueblo
- **Irving St. Residence:** a program of Volunteers of America and located in Denver; participants were from all metro Denver counties (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson)
- **Goodwill Colorado:** two programs - Bankworks at the Denver office on Federal Blvd; staff at different sites throughout the metro area
- **Back on My Feet:** partnered with Salvation Army Harbor Light
- **Bayaud Enterprises:** two programs - Denver Day Works and Adams County Day Works
- **Well Power:** formerly known as Mental Health Center of Denver and its employment and education program, **2Succeed**
- **Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI):** staff of organizations providing employment and training services to unhoused and very low-income individuals from the seven Metro Denver counties
- **Skills2Compete Support Services Committee:** staff and individuals representing organizations serving ten counties statewide

As a result of the different listening sessions and interviews, general issues and thoughts related to the counties below are included within this report: Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Chaffee, Clear Creek, Custer, Denver, Douglas, Eagle, Fremont, Jefferson, Larimer, and Weld.

Although not the focus of this report, CCLP, CWEE, and Spring Institute have collaborated to create additional ways to capture the perspectives of a diverse range of Coloradans related to digital equity, inclusion, and literacy. Approaches include creating an in-person and online survey that is available in English and Spanish to supplement the findings from our in-person listening sessions. While building on the work captured in this summary, the follow-up report mentioned above will include all of the findings related to the partners' digital equity work.

Part 2: Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The following key takeaways arose from the initial outreach work undertaken by the Colorado Center on Law and Policy (CCLP) over the past year or so. These key takeaways are followed by a series of recommendations that respond to the issues raised by listening session participants. Recommendations are divided between those that apply to individuals and those that apply to the larger economic, social, and governmental systems in which listening session participants operate. This division is inspired by the OFOW's Digital Equity Framework, which intentionally separates individual considerations from systemic ones, recognizing that some of the digital inequities facing Coloradans are not ones that can be overcome by individuals alone.

Key Takeaways

- 1.** Most communities in Colorado have mixed levels of digital skills based on how their personal circumstances have required them to learn and use technology. Individuals who are in programs now may have received computer skills training of some type previously, but most of those skills are now outdated and somewhat obsolete due to changes in hardware and software.
- 2.** Many individuals use phones to perform basic functions such as keeping in contact with family members and tracking other daily requirements via actual phone calls or text messages. Other marginalized populations rely on their phones for survival in terms of entertainment, access to information, learning about different career options, searching the internet, etc. Participants in two different treatment programs exhibited very high digital skill levels overall, and at least three interviewees had taught different types of digital programs and systems. They each expressed that when they were required to have no access to personal phone for 30 days as part of the treatment model, those 30 days were the “worst time of my life”.
- 3.** Learning how to navigate new programs, apps, changes in technology is influenced and impacted depending on the amount of time that someone spent on computers, keyboards, different software, cell phones, etc. during their lives, and as a result, has acquired a certain level of understanding about devices and computers, and generally what they are able to do. Those populations that have had less exposure or requirement to use digital skills on a daily basis or do not have someone who is able to perform those tasks seemed to voice similar frustration, anxiety, embarrassment along with the realization of how digital skills are an integral part of life at this time.
- 4.** Exposure and the expectation to use the technology on a regular basis has a big influence on an individual's overall digital skill level as well as the rate of adoption and trust in the internet and doing activities digitally. Input and comments heard from highly

educated individuals who were content experts but not required or able to use technology until a certain time in their lives had similar perspectives about the challenges they face now as individuals who have not had access to technology due to poor connectivity where they lived, limited resources to own or access a device, limited access to skills training that is necessary to perform immediate functions, etc.

5. There is a need for access to coaching, technical assistance related to equipment—as well as how to use it, training on how to effectively use video conferencing platforms, and other parts of technology that are not necessarily part of obtaining a “top job” in Colorado.
6. Individuals interviewed representing all ages, populations, and communities consistently said that having designated navigators, coaches, “experts at a job” or others who are available to assist with technology questions are crucial to helping people to feel comfortable with and willing to learn. Those interviewed emphasized the importance of creating environments at libraries, schools, public agencies, workforce centers, social service organizations, and businesses overall where it is ok to ask questions, and whoever is interacting with the individual is polite, respectful, and patient.
7. The issue of obtaining effective equipment that is compatible with the needs of any individual/family/household, affordable within the household budget to acquire, provide adequate security (of the data and information on the device) as well as the device itself should be discussed extensively as part of the state’s digital equity initiative. Listening sessions revealed a concern about know what type of equipment to purchase if able in terms of affordability, durability, functionality for desired purposes. Similar questions and issues were raised in sessions related to having adequate data storage capacity and security
8. Creating opportunities to learn the skills you need and want that are affordable and also available when your own schedule is open and that uses non-traditional approaches is needed to reach diverse communities and individuals. Internet public service information that tell Coloradans and new residents how and where to learn more digital skills that are posted on Tik Tok, You Tube, other popular apps and websites would be a good way to do this in addition to having this same information on different TV channels in multiple languages and as public service announcements in places such as DMV, courts and other state offices.
9. Preparing and implementing a state plan that is truly able to demonstrate a commitment to equity will take a long term vision, public investment, and an understanding and message from the state that this is part of the “new normal”.
10. There are many efforts occurring within different state agencies, regions, and targeted communities focused on upskilling individuals and families in the areas of digital skills

and technology that could share resources, knowledge, promising practices and expertise related to specific populations.

11. There are different investments occurring that assume a specific level of digital inclusion and skill level of the same populations that are recognized as needing greater resources. Increased coordination and collaboration between the different state agencies will be an important key to creating an effective and successful state digital equity plan.

Recommendations: Individuals

The following recommendations are based on the multitude of perspectives that were voiced and shared during the listening sessions and ongoing conversations with advocates and staff in diverse settings. They are organized according to the categories reflected in the Digital Inclusion Framework created through the Office of the Future of Work.

Equipment

1. Differentiate for each individual and family member how different interactive platforms used in public schools, homework and homeschooling, adult education and higher education programs in terms of how different devices and related apps and programs are available and loaded onto each device.
2. Develop materials that explain basic definitions - what is “an app”, what is “data storage”, what is “the cloud”, etc.
3. Develop clear and understandable guidelines for all potential customers to know what types of device, computer, tablet or other is needed to support the specific needs of an individual - create more detailed guidelines that are available as part of this initiative along with how affordability can be considered as well.
4. Develop the same types of guidelines that are simple to use and understand and also provide information using graphics, different languages and cultural approaches.
5. Identify recommended training guidelines for services staff at different companies and retail outlets that are recommended by different training programs and technical support providers.
6. Publish a standard set of questions for customers to use when renting, purchasing, or receiving devices of all types as gifts from others.
7. Publish a tool kit that addresses these different aspects of choosing good equipment for the particular level of use in an individual’s home, as well as in public spaces that provide access to equipment - focus on generic qualities rather than specific brand names of products.

8. Similarly, establish guidelines, graphics, instructions and questions for those obtaining a device in terms of understanding how data and personal information is protected and the types of security programs that are recommended for different levels of device use as well as information storage.
9. Develop standard guidelines that are published and distributed across the state demonstrating how to care for and maintain any device.

Connectivity

1. Encourage individuals to identify a personal connectivity plan that includes consideration of internet access in a specific neighborhood (including in congregate living situations), affordability for personal budget, and a standard of connectivity that meets state guidelines and recommendations and personal needs (remote work, simple use of internet, etc.).
2. Provide guidance to individuals to show unrestricted and public Wi-Fi sites for those who need access – examples could be power outages, natural disasters and emergencies (such as fires that suddenly reduce internet access for full communities; i.e. Grand Lake/Granby 2019, Boulder/Broomfield counties, 2022); lack of access to public hot spots due to COVID and other health concerns.
3. Encourage individuals and families to create and understand a back-up digital plan if connectivity is disrupted.
4. Ensure that affordable internet access to individual homes is available to the number of devices in a given home and supports the households intended use of the internet (e.g., internet services that allows streaming of videos or teleconferencing).
5. Define and publicize how different connectivity options exist in different communities.

Adoption, Trust, Comfort with Navigation

1. Within the individual digital equity plan templates, create personal goals for overcoming specific fears and limitations related to adopting new technology and its uses.
2. Encourage individuals to identify someone trustworthy that can assist with figuring out how to use different digital technologies and platforms, such as family members, friends, colleagues, teacher, etc.
3. Identify general apps or websites that are needed for basic survival in Colorado and ensure they are inexpensive or free and easy to download. Examples might include the location of affordable food, rental assistance sites, Google Maps, transportation routes, accessible and affordable health clinics, workforce centers, etc. Making these apps

understandable and easy to use will help people feel more comfortable with learning how to use digital technology.

4. Provide different types of forums and resources that very simply describe ways to protect yourself on a device in terms of having personal information stolen or compromised, and also provide opportunities to practice using different devices without feeling that something bad will happen when someone makes a mistake, pushes the wrong button, etc.
5. Develop different guidebooks that provide tips for creating, storing and remembering strong passwords that increase overall stability and security of equipment.

Ongoing Opportunities to Upgrade Skills

1. Identify current skill levels, limitations, or areas where individual feels confident versus areas that are new, unfamiliar, or challenging.
2. Use the state template to determine action steps that will build on current skill levels – make available to all individuals along with staff or coaches who are available to assist and support an individual’s skill development.
3. Identify skills that should be prioritized based on immediate expectations in personal or professional life and ensure that Coloradans without such skills understand the benefits of learning them, either personally or professionally.
4. Using the digital navigators as a possible example, identify how most public spaces are now “active training environments”. Explore how this reality can be transitioned into the opportunity to learn new skills. Hospitals, medical offices, banks, state DMV offices, restaurants, grocery stores, etc. are all possible spaces where individuals from all backgrounds can learn new digital skills in very quick amounts of time and that builds general skill agility and confidence over time.
5. Increase the number of resources that are available to the public using local and state library systems as models for promising practices as well as locations that are accessible and welcoming to all Coloradans.
6. Digital challenges and expectations for refugees and other New Americans include limitations with paying rent including from third party sponsor (resettlement centers, other sponsoring organizations) when certain landlords require all payments and communications be executed electronically.

Recommendations: Systemic

The following recommendations are based on the multitude of perspectives that were voiced and shared during the listening sessions and ongoing conversations with advocates and staff in diverse settings. They are organized according to the categories reflected in the Digital Inclusion Framework created through the Office of the Future of Work.

Equipment

1. Emphasize the ongoing need for the creation of public policy and public investments that provide affordable access to high-capability equipment (phones, computers, iPads, Chromebooks) since many older devices are outdated and not effective for basic needs. This is especially important as new versions of operating systems, apps, and other software may not be compatible with older systems, effectively preventing Coloradans with such equipment from using it in the way they are required to or would like to.
2. Identify and sustain a statewide strategy for creating affordable access to equipment, software, apps, repairs, and maintenance that responds to the income levels of diverse populations – repairs can range from doing a performance evaluation on a computer to more immediate needs such as a broken cell phone cover that can be expensive to fix.
3. Include minimum standards of equipment capacity as part of this strategy – i.e. access to most commonly used software programs, platforms and video conferencing portals that are required to apply for benefits, licenses, Colorado IDs, etc.
4. Use current apps and websites that are more commonly used (i.e. What's App, You Tube, Google Maps) by more individuals as platforms for guiding Colorado residents to more digital training and information available to the public.
5. Identify common apps that are standard for all devices, including those that are distributed to students, to develop and load onto basic equipment recommended by the state - not brands as much as different types of devices.
6. Develop a thorough list of apps available to state agencies and residents that are targeted towards different parts of daily life and also skill development. Clearly identify ones that are available to different cultures and groups coming to Colorado as refugees and immigrants, as well as for long-term non-Native English speaking residents.
7. Coordinate with state agencies that are addressing early childhood development issues as well as agencies responsible for overseeing other marginalized groups to be involved in the development of the state plan - examples - Early Milestones and new Early Childhood Development Office; New Financial Empowerment Office; AARP and other state offices addressing issues and concerns related to aging populations; the state

Department of Corrections and other agencies administering re-entry and probation programs.

Connectivity

1. Incorporate standards of connectivity that have been reviewed by the State Library system into the state digital equity plan – this creates a threshold for diverse communities where public access to connectivity is a necessity.
2. Create a sustained emphasis and investment into accessible connectivity into all homes and businesses in Colorado over the next 5 years, with strong connectivity to community hubs as the initial priority.
3. Develop diverse methods for residents of Colorado to access broadband internet service at the same cost that is currently offered by Comcast and similar companies.
4. Create a “branding/marketing” plan that offers online messaging related to where to go for more assistance with the digital navigator program statewide, including online advertising in form of fun Public Service Announcements that pop up on shopping, telehealth, PEAK applications and other platforms that individuals may need to access that let individuals know where they can get assistance with affordable and adequate internet access where they are currently living - community/public spaces along with affordable subscriptions for home use.
5. Prioritize the need statewide for connectivity to homes and communities to be affordable and have the capacity to serve the needs of residents from diverse backgrounds.
6. In addition to Broadband mapping and subsequent investments, identify resource and service hubs and centers in different counties where high speed and accessible connectivity are available along with coaches and navigators that have the training to respond to different presenting issues.

Adoption, Trust, Comfort with Digital Use and Navigation

1. Communities of all sizes should identify diverse strategies for creating safe public spaces for internet access if individuals do not have personal privacy at place of residence – this includes individuals living in dorms, shelters, intergenerational/multifamily homes, shared living spaces, transitional living and treatment programs, re-entry programs as well as diverse places of incarceration, etc.
2. Suggested ideas from listening sessions and conversations with other states include creating soundproof cubicles, creating incentives for large digital tech providers and developers to include simple explanations for how and why different platforms can be useful.

3. Establish protocols for state agencies to determine how the fears, resistance, frustrations, large learning curve, literacy issues and reduced familiarity with basic digital practices can be mediated by providing culturally responsive guidance, instructions and ongoing coaching as a normal service more than one where someone feels “stupid”, “slow”, “out of touch”, “left behind”, etc.
4. Create guidance and expectations of all state agencies to incorporate culturally responsive language in any platform or public website that has programs that exist to provide opportunities, resources, and benefits to all eligible Coloradans.
5. Elevate the importance for all public entities to provide accurate and culturally responsive guidance related to addressing the security concerns of information stored on a device. During listening sessions numerous individuals raised the issue of how the All conversations included the need for state to embrace the urgency of creating digital equity models that address security issues to protect digital users from having personal information stolen or revealed, being victimized online, or being compromised in different ways.
6. The issue of security of personal equipment and other devices should also be addressed for individuals and verification processes, and creating and tracking passwords have created new challenges while using digital technology.
7. Create a strategy with measurable milestones for state agencies and their diverse programs to move towards developing and launching a uniform system of portals, platforms and websites that are navigable by all Coloradans using basic digital skills. Feedback from listening sessions is that navigating these different public portals is a major stressor and challenge of daily life and consumes more time than people have – examples included platforms required by different public-school districts, workplaces, shopping sites, and public events (to name a few).
8. Create accessibility and usability guidelines in state website or apps that allow users to easily and directly access the information or services they need without extra frills, gimmicks, or “loyalty” features that are used by private corporations but add to the complexity of using the app or website for the user.
9. Ensure that all state platforms or website that may require a user to fill out a lengthy application or form allow that user to stop and save their progress if and when needed. Losing information when they needed to seek help or to gather information necessary to advance in the form or application was frequently mentioned by focus group participants as a source of frustration in using state digital systems.
10. Emphasize the need for a centralized repository for resources as prescriptive guidelines for all four major areas of the CDLE/OFOW framework - 1) equipment/devices along with maintenance and updates; 2) connectivity at the state level as well as into

someone's home or aggregate living facilities including shelters, apartments, residential programs, and community settings such as libraries and recreation centers; 3) adoption strategies that acknowledge diverse concerns of Colorado residents; and 4) continuous access to skill development and upgrading.

- 11.** Create a Toolkit that describes technical issues as mentioned above, and also discusses Promising Practices that have been used by different communities to create more trust and willingness to learn different digital skills.
- 12.** Translators and interpreters consistently report challenges they face in assisting non-Native English speakers to understand digital terms - the experience of many translators is to feel that they are having to translate "twice" - first the content of any topic, and then determining how to explain the actual technology as well while translating.
- 13.** Create tools at the state level that are focused on translating technology terms that relate directly to using different devices, apps, passwords, programs, etc.
- 14.** Create distinctions in the state plan along with specific investments to focus on needs of individuals and families with all types of disabilities, including mental health, behavioral health and cognitive issues.

Ongoing Opportunities to Upgrade Skills

- 1.** Establish state digital navigator program with the knowledge that the needs of Colorado residents will be broad and not based on certain assumptions.
- 2.** Integrate the capabilities of current state websites and platforms to provide access to culturally and geographically relevant and responsive information.
- 3.** Identify and develop innovative ways to direct individuals to skill-learning opportunities – i.e. use online advertising strategies to let customers of popular sites including Uber, Door Dash, Instagram and You Tube know about digital skills and inclusion resources.
- 4.** Integrate creation of new resource directories into the job descriptions of the digital navigator program – a direct request from several listening sessions was to specifically create an "app library" that offers important services and information to address basic needs.
- 5.** As part of SB22-140, create opportunities, incentives, and expectations for employers to invest in skill development of all levels as part of work-based learning and staff-development goals.
- 6.** During listening sessions and national discussions there is increased emphasis on partnering with businesses to expand their investment in digital upskilling of current employees as a fundamental operating cost and their commitment to creating greater digital equity.

7. Incentivize organizations to create their own apps for special populations to assist with resource navigation by the participants.
8. Continue to incentivize and encourage communities where the public libraries, community organizations, and workforce centers have created digital coalitions that expand access and types of services available to all residents.
9. Diversify how different funding opportunities are distributed to rural and underserved communities. Two considerations for state and local agencies are determining ways that small, non-traditional organizations can access public funding opportunities without facing the many barriers and costs that prevent these organizations or businesses from being able to apply; and determining how incentives for different digital upskilling advocates and ambassadors can be incorporated into benefits programs without creating new penalties.
10. Be intentional in state policymaking to financially support innovative learning and upskilling opportunities to honor diverse learning styles and lived experiences.
11. Consider the possibility of creating different “stackable” credentials or apprenticeships that are focused on digital literacy attainment (including digital skill agility) - there seems to be an assumption by different systems that digital skills will be attained “somewhere” before someone is then ready to pursue different training opportunities and career pathways.
12. Encourage and expect employers and businesses to provide no-cost digital upskilling and adequate training and coaching to employees in general, particularly when such skills are necessary to complete the individual’s job responsibilities. Not only with specific systems that are used at the place of business, but teaching staff how to use other commonly used meeting platforms, databases, communication tools, etc.
13. Understand that even Coloradans with current digital skills will need opportunities to up-skill or re-learn programs and apps as those apps change and advance over time. Learning to use Excel ten years ago does not necessarily mean an individual would know how to use the latest version of Excel today.
14. Digital upskilling will be a long-term investment for the state, and also for every individual and system in Colorado.

Part 3. Next Steps

Digital equity, inclusion, and literacy are fundamental issues for Coloradans in the 21st century. While those we spoke with held different opinions on whether or not our society's shift towards digital and online platforms was a good thing, all acknowledged that this shift was happening and would continue to happen regardless of how they felt. In other words, most Coloradans believe that their need to learn digital skills will only grow over time, even if they do not want to, in order to fully participate in society. This did not mean, however, that those we spoke with were comfortable at the pace with which systems were transitioning from analog to digital operations, and stressed the importance of having a real, living, human being to talk with when they are facing issues or need help.

The key takeaways and recommendations provided in the previous section were lifted up in order to inform the creation of Colorado's digital equity plan. These are not exhaustive of all of the feedback and input we have received to date. As mentioned at the beginning of this report, CCLP, CWEE, and Spring Institute will continue to engage with Coloradans across the state who represent one or more of the priority populations identified in the federal Digital Equity Act. We hope that report will supplement the findings and recommendations provided in this one by providing more insights from the perspectives of those we engaged with through listening sessions and interviews along with bi-lingual surveys over the course of 2022 - 23.

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