State capacity grants will support digital access, tools and skills

by: Marisa Martinez

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A new infusion of funds will support communities nationwide with digital access, tools and skills. In April, the Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) announced some $811 million in digital equity funding for states, territories, and Native entities.

This funding is the second of three rounds of funding included in the $2.75 billion Digital Equity Act, a bipartisan infrastructure law designed to ensure everyone has affordable home broadband, along with the skills and devices needed to participate in today’s digital economy.

The Digital Equity Act consists of three funding programs: 1) the $60 million State Planning Grant Program; 2) the $1.44 billion State Capacity Grant Program; and 3) the $1.25 billion Competitive Grant Program.
Digital equity plans are the foundation for spending

In 2022, NTIA began awarding $60 million to states and territories to develop their digital equity plans. The purpose of the digital equity plans was to:

- Identify the barriers and challenges to accessing and using digital resources.
- Establish measurable objectives for promoting access to, and meaningful use of broadband.
- Advance digital skills.

The program guidelines required significant community engagement to ensure plans were well-informed by communities. To support this process, in 2022-2023 the Kansas City Fed led a national effort to host two-day workshops for the state employees tasked with developing the digital equity plans.

Since then, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have submitted their digital equity plans to NTIA. Each plan is available for review on NTIA’s website.

**Tenth Districts states to receive more than $66 million in capacity grants**

Fast forward to the recent announcement of $811 million in awards under the State Capacity Grant Program, a first round of awards under the program to states and territories to start implementation of the digital equity plans.
According to the NTIA, the following Tenth District states received about $66.4 million:
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Marisa Martinez is a community development advisor for the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and works out of the Kansas City Office. A new member of the community development team, Martinez is focused on engaging with community stakeholders and sharing community development insights that support the community and financial needs for underserved communities across western Missouri, Kansas, and Kansas City. Through her work in the nonprofit and banking sectors over the past 25 years, Martinez has embraced the value of financial empowerment and its impact on personal finance and a thriving community. Prior to joining the Kansas City Fed, Martinez served as the senior vice president of community development at a large financial institution, where she managed a team that delivered inclusive banking products and services in underserved communities. Prior to that role, Martinez served as the bank’s CRA officer, where she developed an appreciation for the Community Reinvestment Act and how policies can encourage innovative and responsive solutions that support marginalized communities. Martinez is a second-generation Mexican American and first-generation college student, earning an undergraduate degree in social psychology, graduate certification in nonprofit leadership, and master’s degree in public administration. Outside of work, Martinez enjoys spending time with her husband John and their dog Lola, and hosting large family gatherings.

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